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EVENINGS
IN THE ORCHESTRA

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Music and Musicians



STORIES OF THE GREAT OPERAS

by Ernest Newman

VOLUME I. RICHARD WAGNER

PURCELL

by Henri Dupré

MY MUSICAL LIFE

by Nikolai A. Rimsky-Korsakoff

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN RICHARD STRAUSS

AND HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL,

1907-1918

THIRTY YEARS' MUSICAL RECOLLECTIONS

by Henry F. Chorley

CHOPIN

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A MUSICAL CRITIC'S HOLIDAY

by Ernest Newman

Evenings in the Orchestra

HECTOR BERLIOZ



*Translated from the French
by Charles E. Roche
with
an Introduction
by Ernest Newman*



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Michel Lévy Frères, Paris, 1854

TO
My Good Friends
THE ARTISTS OF THE ORCHESTRA
of X,
a Civilized Town

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INTRODUCTION

I

IT IS ALWAYS difficult, where Berlioz is concerned, to distinguish between the naked truth and the embellished truth; and on the subject of his own journalism his words are no more to be taken at their face value than they are on any other subject. He would have us believe that he was *forced* to become a writer for the press. "Fatality!" he cries in his *Mémoires*; "I became a critic: I had to write feuilletons!" And he proceeds to tell us how his friend Humbert Ferrand suggested that he should undertake the musical criticism of *Le Correspondant*. The truth is that it was he himself who in 1828 (he was twenty-five years of age at the time) asked Ferrand for a letter of introduction to M. d'Eckstein, one of the contributors to *Le Correspondant*, with a view to his becoming the musical critic of that journal. His first article appeared in April 1829. In February 1831, having won the Prix de Rome, he left for Italy, returning to Paris at the end of May 1832. In a very short time we find him contributing to several journals besides *Le Correspondant*—*Le Corsaire*, *La Revue européenne*, *L'Europe littéraire*, and *Le Rénovateur*, this last-named amalgamating with *La Revue européenne* in 1833.

Berlioz had a double motive in becoming a regular journalist. Chronically in debt through the concerts he had had to give at his own expense in order to bring his music before the public, he had saddled himself in October 1833 with a wife who turned out in every respect more of a liability than an asset. But apart from considerations of finance, there was an inappeasable need in him to write, in part as a carefully calculated means to publicity, in part from a genuine interest in ideas. Musical journalism in those days seems to have been even more poorly paid than it is now; and

Berlioz could make both ends meet only by writing for a number of papers. In January 1834 the music-publisher Schlesinger founded *La Gazette musicale*; and as Schlesinger was both Berlioz's publisher and his close neighbour, the young composer had little difficulty in getting himself placed on the staff of the new journal. His contributions to *La Gazette musicale*, however, were only occasional, whereas for *Le Rénovateur* he wrote regularly. About 1834 he came into the good graces of the Bertin family, who, as the owners of *Le Journal des Débats*, exercised a powerful influence not only in politics but in the world of art and letters; it was largely owing to the Bertins that Berlioz was able to get *Benvenuto Cellini* produced at the Opéra in 1838.

His first article in the *Débats* appeared in October 1834. The post of musical critic had been vacant since Castil-Blaze left the paper in 1832; Berlioz, who by this time had made his mark as a journalist, was appointed feuilletonist in January 1835. He retained his connexion with his other journals, adding to them, in 1835, *Le Monde dramatique*. In January 1836 *Le Rénovateur* became merged in *Le Quotidienne*, Berlioz lost his job, and with it his main financial stand-by. Henceforth the *Débats* was a vital necessity to him. His connexion with it lasted until 1864, when his income from other sources having attained the modest but for him, satisfactory figure of about ten thousand francs per annum he felt he could sacrifice, for his soul's peace' sake, the twelve or fifteen hundred francs a year that the *Débats* had brought him.

2

The Bertins had perhaps not been wholly disinterested in inviting Berlioz to join their staff. Mlle Louise Bertin, the daughter of the head of the family, dabbled in music. Miss Ferrier, when at work on a new novel, used to excuse herself from the claims of society on her by pleading that she was "with book"; Mlle Bertin, about the time her father began to look with a kindly eye on Ber-

lioz, was in an equally interesting and even more discreditable condition: she was with opera. Berlioz could be useful to her in two ways—as “musical secretary” (which, we may not uncharitably suppose, meant giving an occasional professional touch to the lady’s dilettantish scores), and as a journalist who had the ear of all Paris, whether one always agreed with him or not. Mlle Bertin’s opera *Esmeralda* was produced in 1836; the ungallant Parisians refused to take it to their hearts, in spite of the fact that a lady had written it; and Berlioz, neither for the first nor for the last time in his life, had to exercise all his literary skill to say next to nothing at considerable length. The task of the musical critic is never a particularly easy one; even if he manages to keep clear himself of entangling friendships in the world of music, there is always the danger that his editor or proprietor may have little fancies of his own—a wife or daughter who sings, a lady-friend in the ballet, or something of that kind—and the critic, whatever his private conviction may be, may sometimes find it diplomatic to be publicly indulgent. And if it is difficult for the critic pure and simple to keep quite free of embarrassing entanglements, the life of a critic who is also a composer or a public performer—and Berlioz was both—must be anything but a bed of roses. It is no wonder that, while everyone in Paris read Berlioz, he had few friends in the official musical world; he had had to puncture too many over-inflated bladders, to take the wind out of the sails of too many ships, to tell the sad truth about too many wretched operas and operettas; and as it was a matter of common knowledge that he had operas and symphonies of his own that he was dying to have performed, what more natural than the assumption that he vented his spleen on the works of more successful men as a partial satisfaction for the frustration of his own ambitions?

Nor was this all. Berlioz, whose luck was always out where

that a good part of Berlioz's energies were consumed in the attempt, generally unsuccessful, to keep her from singing at his concerts. Thanks mainly to her association with the journalist Berlioz she had been given an engagement as Inez in *La Favorita* at the Opéra in 1841; and Berlioz and his friends on the Paris press were hard put to it to frame excuses for her failure. Laying stress on the excellence of her figure, he now demanded a boy's part for her; and accordingly Marie appeared as the page Isolier in Rossini's *Count Ory*. Berlioz and his faithful few could now be more or less silent about the lady's musical qualifications and concentrate on praise of her person. It is true that one critic was ungallant enough to draw attention to the curious habit she had of giving at the knees whenever she had a high note to sing; but the enthusiastic Berlioz, relieved to be able this time to keep off the awkward question of her singing, enlarged upon her physical charms. The costume of Isolier, it seems, was so difficult a one to carry that certain other actresses of the part, when the spectator's attention was drawn to their legs and waist, looked like "a sack of nuts on a stool." Now it so happened that Isolier was one of the favourite parts of Mlle Stoltz, at that time the chief star at the Opéra. She had hitherto been well-disposed towards Berlioz; she not only had been the Ascanio in his *Benvenuto Cellini*, but had sung at his concerts. She had considerable influence with Léon Pillet, the director of the Opéra; and it requires little knowledge of musical human nature to realize how little Berlioz could henceforth count on Mlle Stoltz's co-operation in his efforts to get a footing in the national theatre.

3

Everywhere, indeed, he must have made enemies by his journalism, and the more honest he was, the more animosity he was cer

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Everywhere, indeed, he must have made enemies by his journalism, and the more honest he was, the more animosity he was certain to evoke. He would hardly have remained a critic as long as he did had it not been, not merely that his livelihood partly depended on this work, but that he felt that his position on the press

strengthened his arm in the fight for the recognition of his own music. He never ceases to lament his servitude to scribbling. "Such is my aversion to work of this nature," he says in the *Mémoires*, "that I cannot hear a first representation without an uneasiness that goes on increasing until my feuilleton is finished. This never-ending, still-beginning task poisons my life. And yet, independently of the income it gives me, with which I cannot dispense, I find it almost impossible to give it up on pain of remaining defenceless in the face of the furious and almost innumerable animosities that it has stirred up against me." And in a later chapter: "I stayed at Paris, occupied almost entirely by my métier, I will not say of critic, but of feuilletonist, a very different thing. The critic writes only if he has an idea, if he wants to air a question, combat a system, bestow blame or praise. Then he has motives, which he believes to be sincere, for expressing his opinion and distributing blame or praise. The unhappy feuilleton-writer, compelled to write on everything within the domain of his feuilleton (a sorry domain, a morass full of toads and grasshoppers), desires only to accomplish his task. He has often no opinion whatever about the *things* on which he is forced to write; those *things* excite neither his anger nor his admiration—they *do not exist*. And yet he must *seem* to believe in their existence, seem to have a reason for bestowing attention on them, seem to take part either for or against them"; and he goes on to tell how he once remained shut up in his room for three whole days, trying to drag out of himself an article on the Opéra-Comique. "And when, on turning round, my eyes fell upon the accursed title inscribed at the head of the accursed sheet of paper, so blank and so obstinately waiting for the other words with which it was to be covered, I felt simply overcome by despair. There was a guitar standing against the table; with one kick I smashed it in the centre. . . . On my chimney two pistols were looking at me with their round eyes. . . . I watched them for a long time. . . . I went so far as to bang my head with my fist.

At last, like a schoolboy who cannot do his lesson, I tore my hair and wept with furious indignation."

4

Berlioz was the greatest musical journalist who has ever lived; the musical critics of each country ought to dine together once a year and drink to the memory of this incomparably brilliant member of their craft. And the toast should be drunk in reverent silence, for it is impossible to remember Berlioz's successes as a journalist without a sympathetic remembrance also of his sufferings. We who follow his unhappy profession cannot hope to emulate his brilliance; but in his sufferings we have our humble part. In every editorial office the quaint impression still prevails that "musical criticism" means scribbling about fiddlers and tenors and coloratura sopranos and other members of the vast musical ignor-entsia, and giving a bored public an account of performances of new works the majority of which should have been strangled at their birth. And if it is hard for the ordinary musicologist who would fain be striving to throw a new light on Palestrina or to solve the problem of the Spanish-Mozarabic neumes to have to waste his time telling a rightly indifferent world how some musical journeyman or other played or sang last night—a no more rational subject for public mention than how the driver of the No. II bus piloted his vehicle through Ludgate Circus yesterday, or how a dentist in a back street stopped Miss Jones's tooth, both operations really calling for more natural intelligence and adaptable skill than singing or playing Schumann or Chopin as Schumann or Chopin is generally sung or played—what agony must this kind of thing have been to the composer who felt himself big with a masterpiece like *Les Troyens*, and yet had to practise abortion upon his own soul almost every day to help bring into the world the misbegotten brats of every musical harlot in Paris from Meyerbeer downwards!

To read the mere names of the composers and the works poor Berlioz had to waste his time upon is to have one's heart racked with pity. No wonder he was always crying out to the gods against his fate:

"It is fifteen years since then," he says after telling us of his three days' struggle with a recalcitrant *feuilleton*, ". . . and my punishment continues still. Destruction! Always to be at it! Oh, let them give me works to write, orchestras to conduct, rehearsals to direct; let me stand eight or ten hours at a time, baton in hand, training choirs without accompaniments, singing their refrains myself, and beating time till I spit blood and my arm is paralysed by cramp; let me carry desks, basses, and harps, remove steps, nail planks like a commissionaire or a carpenter, and, as a change, let me correct proofs or copies at night. All this I have done, I do, I will do. It is part of my life as a musician, and I can bear it without a murmur or even a thought, as the sportsman endures cold, heat, hunger, thirst, the sun, rain, dust, mud, and the thousand other fatigues of the chase. But everlastingly to have to write *feuilletons* for one's bread! to write nothings about nothings! to bestow lukewarm praises on insupportable insipidities! to speak one day of a great master and the next of an idiot, with the same gravity, in the same language! to employ one's time, intelligence, courage, and patience at this labour, with the certainty of not even then being able to serve Art by destroying abuses, removing prejudices, enlightening opinion, purifying the public taste, and putting men and things in their proper order and place! This indeed is the lowest depth of degradation! Better be Finance Minister in a republic! Had I but the choice!"

And we, stretched upon our smaller crosses by his side, echo the crucified one's despairing cry.

Our only consolation under the pitiful spectacle is the reflection that no man who writes as well as Berlioz did can help enjoying

the act of writing, however much he may regret the necessity of having to write, however much he may loathe and despise the subjects on which, and the public for which, he is compelled to keep wasting himself. Nor would he have reprinted so many of his articles in book form unless he had felt a certain expert delight in the workmanship of them. A craftsman may revolt against the job to which he has been put; but if he is as good a craftsman as Berlioz was, he cannot help feeling an æsthetic pleasure in the smooth running of his tools.

The "*Soirées de l'orchestre*" is a compilation from various sources. After the revolution of 1848 the unhappy and rather frightened Berlioz, who saw only a dubious future for French music and for himself under the new regime, turned for consolation to literature, his prime motive no doubt being to justify himself to posterity, and to win from posterity the sympathy he had hungered in vain for in his lifetime. It was at this time that he began his *Mémoires*, which are largely a pastiche. A good deal of the matter for them already existed in the two volumes of the *Voyage musical en Allemagne et en Italie*, published in 1844 and by 1848 out of print. But there were many articles and fantasias that, while unsuited to the *Mémoires*, were too good to be buried for ever in journals and out-of-print books; and for these he set himself to find a new home. Some of the more serious of them went later into the volume entitled *A travers chants*. From the *Voyage musical* there were transplanted into the *Soirées de l'orchestre* the following: "*Vincenza*," "*Un Début dans le Freischütz*," "*Le Premier Opéra*," "*Tribulations d'un critique*," "*Le Suicide par enthousiasme*," and "*Le Tenor, astronomie musicale*."

The idea of the *Soirées* came to him in London in 1852. Things were going none too well with him financially, and he thought he might make a little money by reprinting some of the lighter of his old articles—"a very amusing volume," as he described it in advance in a letter to a friend, "very mordant, very varied, with the title of *Les Contes de l'orchestre*." The book, with the title al-

tered to *Les Soirées de l'orchestre*, appeared in December 1852 and was an immediate success—a success, indeed, that had in it a tang of bitterness for Berlioz, who would have preferred the French public to think a little less of him as a writer and a little more of him as a composer. There were probably many people who felt that a man who wrote such good prose and was obviously so intelligent could hardly be a good composer. The malicious Scudo no doubt expressed the general opinion when he said, apropos of Berlioz's election to the Institut, that instead of adopting a composer they had taken a journalist.

6

There are a few serious chapters in the *Soirées*, but in general, if we want to study Berlioz as a serious critic, it is to *A travers chants* that we must go. It is mostly Berlioz the journalist that we have in the *Soirées*, and Berlioz the journalist at his best. Not only is the selection finely calculated to secure constant change of interest, but the mere jointing and mortaring of the articles is the work of a consummate literary artist. We may deplore the lack of the sense of form here and there in his music, but here the feeling for fitness and proportion is as admirable as the design itself is original. He had not merely to bring together a number of articles from various quarters and bind them within the covers of a book; he had to make a *book* of them. He solved his problem in brilliant fashion by inventing the binding thread of an opera orchestra that talks and argues and tells stories and listens to them on the evenings when the music is too inane to occupy its attention. In this way Berlioz not only gets his principle of unity, but achieves that "art of transition" that Wagner declared to be the vital thing in music. Each story, each discussion, is led up to in the most natural way imaginable; even after the book has been ended with an "epilogue"—the farewell supper at which Berlioz, who is of course the gentleman with whom the orchestra has had

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all these colloquies, has delivered himself of his swelling peroration on the sorry state of art and the ideals of the artist—and the necessity arises for a “second epilogue,” how dexterously he effects the organic unity of this coda with the body of the work by the device of a letter from Corsino, raising fresh points that can be elucidated only by the long account of the Beethoven celebrations at Bonn, the article on Méhul, the description of the state of music in London, the reply to an Italian attack on him apropos of Italian music and Paganini, and the rollicking fantasia on the theme of Vincent Wallace.

The book is in the main an expression of Berlioz's anger and disgust with contemporary musical conditions, especially in Paris; and not less striking than the sound sense at the core of his rage are the adroitness and the air of detachment with which he invariably leads up to the subject of the moment; never have an artist's personal grievances been given such an airing without the artist himself coming out into the open, never have masked batteries done such execution in musical polemics. Apart from the wit with which the thing is done, the book is a historical document because of its exhibition *sub specie aeternitatis* of all the evils under which the idealistic musician groans during his long pilgrimage—the indifference of the great public, the density of accredited officials, the vanities and stupidities of the singers, the women who insist on patronizing art and are the plague of artists, the thousand impediments that a slow-moving world places in the way of the artist's realization of his dreams. And if we are to take seriously, as no doubt for the most part we must, Berlioz's accounts of the anguish his feuilletons cost him, all the greater must our admiration be for the artistic detachment that enabled him, as soon as he took his pen in hand, to stand at a distance from the cause of his sufferings and see them objectively as subjects for the art of letters, to universalize them, and to sprinkle them with the salt of an irony that has kept them fresh even to our day. He has really left little more to be said on such sempiternal topics as tenors, professors, coteries, *clagues*,

Philistines, opera-houses, and the curious belief of the English that there is something vastly more creditable in playing an orchestra work or putting on an opera badly after two rehearsals than there would be in doing it well after ten.

It is a sad commentary on the transiency of music that a critic's enthusiasms soon become old-fashioned, only his epigrammatic skimming of the surface of contemporary life standing much chance of being remembered in his favour after he is dead. We are interested today in Berlioz's raptures over composers like Spontini, but we find it difficult to share them, or even always to understand them. It is mostly in virtue of the strength of his repulsions, not the rightness of his sympathies, that a critic attracts the languid attention of posterity. Had Artusi praised Monteverdi, we should probably never have heard of him; Scheibe's name is preserved for us, not because he poured any honey on Bach, but because he left his sting in him; and thousands of people who have not the least idea how much good sense Chorley and Hanslick talked upon music remember them for one or two mistakes they made about Wagner. It is because there is so much acid in the *Soirées de l'orchestre*, an acid distilled from Berlioz's broodings on his own grievances, that the book has preserved its flavour and its nutriment. He knew only that under his sufferings as a musical critic he had to grow a defensive armour; he could not foresee that the armour itself would be of perpetual interest to his humbler fellow-practitioners for its solidity and its beauty. He was mostly concerned with the immediate business in hand of fighting fools; we can enjoy more than he could possibly have done the skill and resource of the bonny fighter he was. Let every critic who has nothing to say on some subject on which there is really nothing to say, but on which something has to be said, and who does not know how to get out of the difficulty, study the art with which Berlioz plays the hooked reader on the end of his line in the eighteenth of these Evenings, and the smooth sardonic art with which he makes a fool of a librettist or a composer look an even bigger fool than God made him. Sometimes

he uses only the butt end of his wit, but that none the less effectively, as in the article on Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* (in the *Gazette musicale* of 3 April 1842, not reprinted in the *Soirées*), in which, by a certain sprinkling of capitals over the article, he makes it throw out the word CAUCHEMAR like a sort of rash. But as a rule the wit pinks like a rapier. Could anything be neater, swifter, or more deadly than the stab of the demure suggestion that a certain Don Giovanni should be given the Prix Monthyon, or than the admonition of the conductor, after the orchestra has talked all through some wretched opera, "Silence, gentlemen, the performance is over"?.

ERNEST NEWMAN

SPEAKERS IN THE DIALOGUE

THE CONDUCTOR.

CORSINO, first violin, composer.

SIEDLER, leader of the second violins.

DIMSKY, first double-bass.

TURUTH, second flute.

KLEINER SENIOR, kettle-drummer.

KLEINER JUNIOR, first violoncello.

DERVINCK, first oboe.

WINTER, second bassoon.

BACON, viola (no descendant of the man who invented gun-powder).¹

MORAN, first horn.

SCHMIDT, third horn.

CARLO, orchestra-boy.

A GENTLEMAN, habitué of the orchestra stalls.

THE AUTHOR.

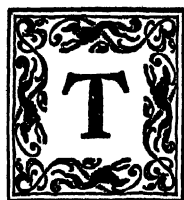
¹ There is here a play upon words. *Il n'a pas inventé la poudre* is equivalent to *He'll never set the Thames on fire!*

▪

Evenings in the Orchestra

▪

PROLOGUE



HERE is in northern Europe a lyric theatre where the custom exists among the members of the orchestra, several of whom are intellectual men, to indulge in reading, nay, even in more or less literary and musical talks during the performance of all mediocre operas. This means that they read and talk a good deal. On every music-stand a book of some kind is consequently to be seen beside the part. And so it is that the musician who appears to be the most intensely absorbed in contemplating his part, and the most deeply engaged in counting his rests, while watching for his cue, is frequently enjoying all the time Balzac's marvellous scenes, Dickens's charming word-paintings of manners, nay, even the study of one of the sciences. I know one who, during the first fifteen performances of a celebrated opera, read, re-read, pondered over, and grasped the meaning of the three volumes of Humboldt's *Cosmos*; another who, during the long run of an opera that is nowadays relegated to obscurity, managed to learn English; and yet another who, gifted with an exceptional memory, has retailed to his neighbours more than ten volumes of tales, stories, anecdotes, and jolly quips.

One member alone of this orchestra does not indulge in any diversion whatever. Wholly devoted to his work, activity itself, unremitting, with his eyes glued to his notes and his arm in perpetual motion, he would consider himself dishonoured were he to miss a quaver or deserve censuring for the quality of his tone. At the end of each act, flushed, perspiring, exhausted, he can hardly breathe, and yet he dares not take advantage of the moments left to him by the suspension of musical hostilities to go and quaff a glass of beer at the adjoining café. The fear of being late and missing the first bars of the next act is sufficient to keep him glued to his chair. Moved by such zeal, the manager of the theatre to which he belongs sent him, one fine day, six bottles of wine, by way of "encouragement." The artist, conscious of his "worth," far from welcoming the gift with gratitude, haughtily returned it to the manager with these words: "I do not need encouragement." The

reader will have guessed that I am speaking of the man who plays the big drum.

His colleagues, contrariwise, hardly interrupt their readings, tales, discussions, and talks, except in favour of a great masterpiece, or when, in the ordinary operas, the composer has entrusted them with a principal and prominent part, in which case their deliberate distraction would be too noticeable and would do them harm. But then again, since the orchestra is never playing at its full strength, it follows that if the conversations and literary studies languish on the one hand, they revive on the other, and the fine talkers on the left resume their speech when those on the right have once more taken up their instruments.

My assiduity in frequenting as an amateur this club of instrumentalists, during my annual stay in the town where it is located, has enabled me to listen to the narration of a goodly number of anecdotes and little romantic tales; I have even, I admit, often returned the narrators' courtesy by telling a story or giving a reading in my turn. Now the orchestral player is naturally prone to repeating himself, and when he has interested his auditory for once by a witty remark or any sort of tale, let us say on the 25th of December, one may rest assured that in order to gather fresh laurels by the same means he will not wait till the end of the year. And so it has come about that by dint of hearing these pretty stories they have ended by obsessing me almost as much as the feeble scores to which they served as accompaniment; and so I have decided to put them into writing, nay, to publish them, adorned with the episodical dialogues of hearers and narrators, in order to present a copy to each one of them, and that the subject may then be dropped.

It is understood that only the player of the big drum will not participate in my bibliographical bounties. So strong and hard-working a man scorns the exercises of the mind.

FIRST EVENING

The First Opera, a romance of the past. —

Vincenza, a sentimental romance. — *The Worries of Kleiner senior*



VERY insipid modern French opera is being given. The musicians go to their seats with a decided look of ill temper and disgust. They disdain to tune, a matter to which their conductor does not seem to pay any attention. When the A is given out by an oboe, however, the violins cannot but see that they are a good quarter of a tone above the wind.

"Hallo," says one of them, "the orchestra is nicely discordant! Let's play the overture like this; what a lark it will be!"

And, truly, the musicians boldly play their parts, without sparing the public a single note. And, I was going to say, without doing the public any *harm*, since the audience, enraptured with this insipid rhythmical charivari, has shouted *bis*, and the leader of the orchestra is compelled to start it all over again. Only, as a matter of policy, he insists that the string-instruments will be good enough to take the pitch from the wind.

"Why does he harass us? We are in tune."

The overture is repeated, but this time produces no effect. The opera begins, and the musicians gradually cease playing.

"Do you know," asks Siedler, the leader of the second violins, of his neighbour, "what has become of our comrade Corsino, who isn't here this evening?"

"I don't; what has happened to him?"

"He has been put in jail. He allowed himself to insult our director, alleging that, this worthy man having given him an order to compose the music for a ballet, he had delivered the score, which was not played, nor was he paid for it. He was in a boiling rage. . . ."

"Of course he was! Perhaps you don't think that enough to make a man lose all patience? . . . I should like to see you made game of in that fashion, so as to be able to appreciate your strength of mind and your resignation. . . ."

"As for me, I am not that kind of a fool; I know only too well that the word of our director is of no more value than his signature. But pshaw! Corsino will soon be set free. A violinist of his rank is not so easily replaced!"

"So that is the reason why he was arrested?" queried a viola, laying down his bow. "If only he can some day find an opportunity of getting even with him, like that Italian who, in the sixteenth century, made the first attempt at dramatic music!"

"What Italian?"

"Alfonso della Viola, a contemporary of the famous goldsmith, sculptor, and chaser Benvenuto Cellini. I have here in my pocket a romance just published, of which these two are the heroes. I should like to read it to you."

"Out with your romance!"

"Push back your chair a little, you; you are preventing my coming closer."

"Don't make such a row with your double-bass, Dimsky, or we shall not hear a word. Aren't you yet tired of playing that stupid music?"

"What, a story? Wait a minute, I want to be in it." Dimsky hurriedly puts his instrument aside. The entire centre of the orchestra clusters about the reader, who unrolls his brochure, leans his elbow on a horn-case, and begins to read in a low voice.

THE FIRST OPERA *A Romance of the Past. 1555*¹

Florence, 27 July 1555

Alfonso Della Viola to Benvenuto Cellini

I AM feeling melancholy, Benvenuto; I am tired, disgusted, or rather, to speak the truth, I am ill, I feel I am losing flesh just

¹ The first edition of the work of M. Berlioz entitled *Voyage musical en Allemagne et en Italie* having become exhausted, the author refused to have a second one published; all the autobiographic part of that journey is to be inserted and completed by him in another work of greater importance on which he is engaged. [This work was no other than his *Mémoires*, which appeared after his death.] He therefore thought himself free to reproduce in the *Soirées de l'orchestre* fragments of that work such as "*Le Premier Opéra*," and a few others, considering the *Voyage musical* as a destroyed book of which he merely preserved the materials. (French publisher's note.)

as you did before you had avenged Francesco's death. But you, you were soon cured, while the day of my recovery, will it ever dawn? . . . God alone knows! And yet has there ever been suffering worthier of pity than mine? Where is the unfortunate man to whom Christ and the Holy Mother could do a greater act of justice, by granting the sovereign remedy, the precious balm, the most powerful of all to still the bitter dolours of the artist, outraged in his art and in his person—revenge! Oh no, Benvenuto, no indeed, without seeking to contest your right to drive a poniard into the wretched officer who had killed your brother, I cannot prevent myself from putting an immeasurable distance between your offence and my own. What had that poor devil done, after all? Spilled the blood of the son of your mother, it is true. Yet the officer was in command of a night patrol; Francesco was drunk; after having insulted the detachment for no reason, and thrown stones at it, his extraordinary behaviour reached the point of his trying to disarm these soldiers, who of course made use of their weapons, and your brother met his fate. Nothing could have been easier than to foresee the result, and, you will admit, nothing could have been more just.

My own case is different. Although worse has been done me than to kill me, I have in no way deserved my fate; moreover, it is at the time when I was entitled to rewards that I have had to endure outrage and insult.

You know with what perseverance I have worked for many long years to increase the forces, to multiply the resources, of music. Neither the ill will of the old masters, nor the stupid raillery of their disciples, nor the mistrust of the dilettanti who look upon me as a singular creature nearer to insanity than to genius, nor the material obstacles of every kind that are born of poverty, have been able to stop me, as you know. I may say so, since the credit of such conduct counts as nothing in my eyes.

That young Montecco called Romeo, about whose adventures and tragic death there was so much ado in Verona a few years ago, was assuredly not free to resist the charm which attracted him to the lovely Giulietta, daughter of his mortal enemy. Passion was stronger than the insults of the Capuletti varlets, stronger than the iron and the steel with which he was constantly threatened; Giulietta loved him and he would have braved death a thousand

times for an hour spent by her side. Well, then, my own *Giulietta* is music, and, by heaven, I am loved by her!

Two years ago I conceived the plan of a theatrical work without its like up to now, wherein song, accompanied by divers instruments, was to take the place of the spoken word and give birth, from its union with the drama, to impressions such as the most elevated poetry has never produced. Unfortunately this project was most expensive; only a monarch or a Jew could realize it.

All our princes of Italy have heard tell of the ill effect of the so-called musical tragedy performed in Rome towards the end of the last century; the poor success of the *Orfeo* of Angelo Politiano, another attempt of the same kind, is not unknown to them; and nothing would have been more useless than to appeal to them for the support of an undertaking in which certain old masters had failed so completely. Once more, they would have taxed me with pride and madness.

As regards the Jews, I never gave them a moment's thought; all that I could reasonably expect of them was that, on my making a mere statement of my proposal, I should meet with a refusal without insult and without the hoots of the menials; moreover, I was not acquainted with one of sufficient intelligence to be able to reckon, with any degree of certainty, on such generosity. I therefore gave up the idea, not without grief, you may believe me; and it was with an aching heart that I resumed the course of the obscure labours which give me bread, but which are only accomplished at the expense of works the reward of which might perhaps be glory and fortune.

Shortly afterwards another new idea came to disturb me once more. Pray do not laugh at my discoveries, Cellini, and above all beware of comparing my new-born art with your own, which has so long found its form. You know enough about music to understand me. In good faith, do you believe that our trailing madrigals in four parts constitute the height of perfection to which composition and performance can reach? Does not sound sense suggest that in the matter of expression, as in that of musical form, these so greatly vaunted works are merely childish and silly trifles?

The words of them express love, anger, jealousy, valour, while the music, always the same, is like the doleful psalmody of the mendicant friars. Is this all that melody, rhythm, and har-

mony can do? Are there not a thousand applications of these elements of art still unknown to us? From an attentive examination of all that is, cannot we foresee with certainty what is to be and what should be? As to the instruments, have we derived any advantage from these? What of our wretched accompaniments, which dare not part from the voice, following it continually at the unison or the octave? Instrumental music, considered individually, does it exist? And as regards vocal music, what a number of prejudices, and what routine! Why for ever sing in four parts, even in the case of a person lamenting his loneliness?

Is it possible to hear anything more unreasonable than those *canzonette* recently inserted in tragedies, where an actor, speaking in his own name, and holding the stage alone, is none the less accompanied by three other voices in the wings, whence they follow his melody as well (or ill) as they can?

Rest assured, Benvenuto, that what our masters, intoxicated with their own works, today style the height of art is as far from what will be called music in two or three centuries as the monstrous little bipeds kneaded out of mud by children are from your sublime Perseus or from the Moses of Buonarrotti.

There are consequently innumerable modifications to be introduced in an art that is so little advanced as music—immense forward steps remain for it to take. And why should I not help to provide the impulse that will lead to them? . . .

But without telling you in what my latest invention consists, let it be sufficient for you to know that it was such that it could be brought out by the ordinary means, without any appeal to the rich and the great. Time was all I required; and the work once completed, the opportunity of producing it in the full light of day would have been easy to find in the fêtes that were to attract to Florence the élite of the nobility, and the friends of the arts of all nations.

Now, here is the subject of the acrid black anger that is gnawing at my heart.

On a certain morning, as I was at work on this remarkable composition, the success of which would have made me celebrated throughout Europe, Monsignor Galeazzo, the confidential man of the Grand Duke, who had greatly appreciated my Ugolino scene last year, came to me and said: "Alfonso, your day has come. No

longer is it a question of madrigals, cantatas, or little songs. Listen to me; the wedding festivities are going to be splendid; nothing is being spared to give them a brilliance worthy of the two illustrious families about to be allied; your recent triumphs have inspired confidence; the Court now believes in you. Aware of your project of a musical tragedy, I spoke of the matter to His Highness; and your idea delights him. Get to work, then, that your dream may become reality. Write your lyric drama and have no fear about its production; the most expert singers of Rome and Milan shall be summoned to Florence; the most skilled virtuosi of every order shall be placed at your disposal; the Prince is splendidly lavish; he will deny you nothing; come up to my expectations, and your triumph is assured, your fortune is made."

I cannot say what I felt at this unexpected speech, but I stood dumb and motionless. Astonishment and joy deprived me of the power of utterance, and I stood there like an idiot. Galeazzo was not ignorant of the cause of my confusion; pressing my hand, he said: "Farewell, Alfonso; you consent, do you not? You promise to put aside every other work, so as to devote yourself exclusively to the one His Highness asks of you, do you not? Remember that the wedding is to take place in three months' time!" And as I went on signifying my assent by nodding, unable as I was to speak, he added: "Come, now, calm yourself, Vesuvius; farewell. Your commission will reach you tomorrow; it will be signed tonight. It is as good as done. Come, cheer up; we depend on you."

As soon as I was alone, it seemed to me that all the cascades of Terni and Tivoli were bubbling up in my brain.

It was worse still when I realized my good luck, when I pictured to myself once more the grandeur and the beauty of my task. I dash for my abandoned libretto, which had lain yellowing in some corner or other for some time past; I behold once more Paolo, Francesca, Dante, Virgil, the shades, and the damned; I hear that exquisite love sighing and lamenting; tender and graceful melodies, full of abandon, of melancholy, and of chaste passion, course through me; I hear the awful scream of hatred of the outraged husband; I see a couple of entwined corpses roll at his feet; next I see the still united souls of the two lovers, wandering wind-swept in the depths of the abyss; their plaintive voices mingle with the dull and distant rumble of the infernal streams, with the hissing

of the flames, with the mad screams of the wretched beings they pursue, and all the frightful concert of eternal sufferings. . . .

For three days, Cellini, I wandered about aimlessly in a state of constant vertigo; for three months I did not sleep. It was not until after this prolonged spell of fever that lucidity of thought and a sense of reality were restored to me. It required all that time of fiery and desperate struggle for me to recover control over my imagination, and to master my subject. Finally I remained victor.

In that immense framework each part of the picture, disposed in a simple and logical order, bit by bit revealed itself clothed in sombre or brilliant colours, in half-tints or in strong tones; human forms made their appearance, some full of life, others with the cold and pallid aspect of death. The poetical idea, always subordinated to the musical sense, was never an obstacle to the latter; I strengthened, embellished, and intensified the power of the one through the other. In short, I accomplished what I wished to, with so much ease that by the end of the second month the entire work was completed.

I must admit that I felt the need of rest; but when I thought of all the minute precautions necessary in order to secure the execution of my work, my vigilance and vigour returned. I superintended the doings of singers, musicians, machinists, and scene-painters.

Everything went on in good order and with the most astonishing accuracy, and the gigantic musical machine was about to get majestically into motion when an unexpected blow came that smashed its springs, annihilating at the same moment both the fine attempt itself and the legitimate hopes of your unhappy friend.

The Grand Duke, who had asked me of his own accord to compose this musical drama, who had caused me to give up the other work on which I was depending to win popularity for my name, whose gilded words had filled an artist's heart and kindled an artist's imagination, now makes sport of it all; he tells that imagination to cool down, that heart to be calm or break, what matters it to him? In short, he forbids the production of *Francesca*; orders are given to the Roman and Milanese artists to return home; my drama is not to be staged; the Grand Duke will no longer hear of it. *He has changed his mind.* . . . The crowd that was already gathering in Florence, attracted less by the wedding display than by the interest of curiosity that the announcement of the musical fête

had excited throughout Italy, this crowd, so eager for fresh sensations, when frustrated in its expectations at once searches for the reason that deprives it so brutally of the spectacle it had come for, and, unable to discover it, does not hesitate to attribute it to the incapacity of the composer. All say: "That famous drama was, beyond doubt, absurd; the Grand Duke, informed in due time, did not wish that the impotent attempt of an ambitious artist should cast ridicule on the solemn ceremony about to take place. There can be no other reason. A prince never breaks his word in such a fashion. Della Viola is still the same vainglorious and extraordinary individual whom we knew already; his work was not fit to be produced, but out of consideration for him they abstain from saying so."

O Cellini, O my noble, proud, and worthy friend! Think it over for a moment and judge for yourself of my feelings at this unbelievable misuse of power, this unheard-of violation of the most positive promises, this horrible affront which it was impossible to anticipate, this insolent calumny against a production of which nobody in the world knows anything as yet, excepting myself.

What is there to do? What is there to say to that rabble of cowardly fools who laugh when they see me? What answer am I to give my partisans? On whom lay the blame? Who is the author of this diabolical scheme? And how am I to overcome it? Cellini! Cellini! Why are you in France? Why cannot I see you, ask your advice and your aid? By Bacchus, they will drive me literally mad. . . . Oh, cowardice! Oh, shame! I have just felt tears in my eyes. Away from me, all weakness! It is strength, vigilance, composure, that are indispensable to me, for I am bent on having my revenge. Benvenuto, I am determined! When and how matters little, but I will be revenged, I swear it to you, and you will rejoice. Farewell. The glory of your latest triumphs has reached us; I congratulate you and rejoice over them with my whole soul. May God only grant that the French King will leave you time to reply to your friend, *who suffers, but who is not avenged.*

Alfonso della Viola

*Benvenuto to Alfonso**Paris, 20 August 1555*

I ADMIRE, dear Alfonso, the candour of your indignation. Great is mine, believe me, but it is calmer. I have but too often met with similar disappointments to be surprised at the one you have just endured. Your trial was, I admit, a severe one for your young courage, and the revolt of your soul against so grave and so little deserved an insult is as just as it is natural. But, my poor child, you are hardly entering upon your career. Your retired life, your meditations, your labours in solitude, were not likely to teach you anything of the intrigues carried on in the high regions of art, or of the real character of men of power, who are too often the arbiters of the fate of artists.

A few episodes in my history, that I have left untold until now, will suffice to enlighten you in regard to the position of us all, and your own.

I have no fear that your continuity of purpose will be affected by my narrative; your character reassures me; I know you, I have studied you well. You will persevere; you will reach your goal in spite of everything; you are a man of iron mould, and the pebble cast at your head by the mean passions lying in ambush in your path, far from crushing your brow, will evoke fire from it. Learn, then, all I have suffered, and may these sad examples of the injustice of the great serve as a lesson to you.

The Bishop of Salamanca, Ambassador at Rome, had given me an order for a large vase, the extremely minute and delicate work on which occupied me for over two months; and by reason of the enormous quantity of precious metals it required I was almost ruined. His Excellency was profuse in his praises of the uncommon excellence of my work. He had it brought to him, and for two full months said no more about remuneration than if he had received from me only an old saucepan, or a medal by Fioretti. Luck would have it that the vase came back to me for a slight repair; I refused to return it.

The accursed prelate, after having overwhelmed me with abuse

worthy of a priest and a Spaniard, took it into his head to extort from me a receipt for the amount he was still owing me; but as I am not a man to be trapped so easily as that, His Excellency went so far as to have my shop stormed by his valets. I suspected the trick; and so, when those blackguards came in sight with the object of smashing my door, Ascanio, Paolino, and myself, all of us armed to the teeth, gave them so warm a welcome that next day, thanks to my carbine and my long poniard, I was at last paid.²

Far worse happened to me later, when I had made the celebrated button for the Pope's cope, a piece of work so marvellous that I cannot resist describing it to you. I had set the big diamond exactly in the centre of the jewel, and had placed God seated on it in so easy an attitude that He was not in the least out of place in the gem; the result was a beautiful harmony; God was giving His blessing with upraised hand. Underneath I had disposed three tiny angels who supported God with their arms. One of these angels, the centre one, was in high, the others in low relief. Grouped about them was a number of still smaller angels, also disposed with precious stones. God wore a fluttering mantle, whence issued a large number of cherubs and a thousand ornamentations, producing an admirable effect.

Clement VII was full of enthusiasm when he saw the button, and promised me whatever sum I might ask. For all that, matters remained as they were, and as I refused to make a chalice he had ordered in addition, though still without paying me anything, this good Pope, becoming as furious as a ferocious beast, sent me to jail for six weeks. That is all I ever received from him.³

I was hardly free a month when I met Pompeo, the wretched goldsmith who had the insolence to be jealous of me, and against whom, for a long time, I had trouble enough to defend my poor life. I despised him too much to hate him; but on seeing me his face assumed a mocking look unusual to him, a look that, on this occasion, embittered as I was, it was impossible for me not to resent. On my very first movement to strike him in the face, fright made him turn his head, and my dagger stroke found its goal just below the ear. I struck at him twice only, for at the first blow he fell dead in my arms. My intention had not been to kill him, but in

² Historical (Berlioz's note).

³ Historical (Berlioz's note).

the state of mind in which I was, is it ever possible to judge the effects of one's blows? And so, after having already endured one odious imprisonment, I find myself compelled to fly, for having, in a justifiable fit of anger, caused by the dishonesty and the avarice of a Pope, stamped out a scorpion.

Paul III, who showered all kinds of commissions upon me, did not pay me any more than his predecessor did; only, in order to make it appear that it was I who was in the wrong, he conceived a shift worthy of himself, which was truly atrocious. The numerous enemies I had about His Holiness accused me one fine day of having stolen jewels from Clement!

Full well aware of the contrary, Paul III none the less feigns to believe me guilty and has me immured in the Castello S. Angelo, in the very fort that I had so well defended a few years previously during the siege of Rome, under the very ramparts from which I had fired more cannon than all the other gunners together, and from which, to the Pope's intense joy, I had myself killed the Connétable de Bourbon. I succeed in making my escape; I reach the outer walls; suspended from a rope above the moat, I invoke God, who knows the justice of my cause, and cry out to Him as I let myself drop: "Help me, O Lord, since I am helping myself!" God hears me not, and in my fall I break a leg. Weak, dying, covered with blood, I succeed, by dragging myself on my hands and knees, in reaching the palace of my intimate friend Cardinal Cornaro. This base fellow traitorously hands me over to the Pope, in order to get a bishopric.

Paul condemns me to death; then, as if repenting of bringing my sufferings to an end too promptly, he has me cast into a fetid dungeon full of tarantulas and venomous insects; and it is only after six months of these tortures that, glutted with wine during a night's orgy, he grants my pardon to the French Ambassador.⁴

These, my dear Alfonso, are terrible sufferings and persecutions very hard to endure; do not imagine that the wound recently inflicted on your self-esteem can give you an adequate idea of them. Moreover, if an insult addressed to the work and to the genius of the artist would seem to you harder to bear than an outrage committed on his body, was I spared the former, tell me, at the Court of our excellent Grand Duke, at the time I cast my Perseus? I

⁴ Historical (Berlioz's note).

suppose you have not forgotten the grotesque surnames bestowed on me, the insulting sonnets placarded nightly on my door, the secret intrigues by means of which they succeeded in convincing Cosimo that my new casting process would not be a success and that it was madness to entrust me with the metal. Even here, at the brilliant Court of France, where I have made my fortune, where I am powerful and admired, have I not to face a struggle at every turn, if not with my rivals (they are *hors de combat* today), at least with the King's favourite, Madame d'Étampes, who hates me, I know not why! The wicked slut speaks all the ill she can of my works,⁵ and seeks, in a thousand ways, to do me harm in the mind of His Majesty; to speak truly, I am beginning to be so wearied of hearing her bark on my track that, were it not for a great work recently undertaken, from which I anticipate more honour than from all my preceding ones, I should already be starting for Italy.

Indeed, indeed, I have known every kind of shock that fate can inflict upon an artist. And yet I still exist. It is my glorious life that is the torment of my enemies. And I had foreseen it. And now I am able to overwhelm them with my contempt. My revenge is coming slowly, it is true, but for an inspired man, who is sure of himself, patient, and strong, it is a certainty. Consider, Alfonso, that I have been insulted over a thousand times, whereas I have only killed seven or eight men, and such men! I blush to think of it! Direct and personal revenge is a rare fruit, which is not given to everyone to pluck. I have not got the better of Clement VII, of Paul III, of Cornaro, of Cosimo, of Madame d'Étampes, of a hundred other cowardly powerful people; how, then, could you be revenged upon this same Cosimo, the Grand Duke, the ridiculous Mæcnas, who understands your music as little as he does my sculpture, and who has so vilely injured both of us? At any rate, do not think of killing him; it would be an act of madness, the consequences of which are not doubtful. Become a great musician, make your name illustrious, and if the day should dawn when his foolish vanity induces him to tender you his favours, reject them; never accept anything from him and never do anything for him. Such is the advice I give you; I exact your promise that you will follow it; trust to

⁵ Historical (Berlioz's note).

my experiences, for this is the only form of revenge within your reach.

I told you awhile ago that the King of France, nobler and more generous than our Italian sovereigns, had enriched me; it is therefore for me, an artist who loves and admires you, to keep the word of the witless and heartless Prince who is unable to appreciate your talent. I send you ten thousand crowns. This sum will, I think, enable you to produce your drama with music worthily; do not lose an instant. Let it be at Rome, Naples, Milan, Ferrara, anywhere except Florence; not a ray of your glory must cast its light on the Grand Duke.

Farewell, dear child; vengeance is a beautiful thing, and a man may be tempted to lay down his life for it; but art is far more beautiful; never forget that *in spite of everything, a man must live for it.*

Your friend,
Benvenuto Cellini

Benvenuto Cellini to Alfonso della Viola

Paris, 10 June 1557

WRETCH! Mountebank! Buffoon! Pedant! Eunuch! Flautist!⁶ It was not worth while to scream like that, to vomit flames, to talk so much of injury and offence, of fury and outrage, to invoke hell and heaven, in order to reach so vulgar a conclusion! Vile and flaccid mind! Was it necessary to utter such threats, seeing that your resentment was so frail that in barely a couple of years from the day you were insulted to your face you were to go down on your knees in so cowardly a fashion, and kiss the hand that had inflicted the outrage?

What? Neither the promise you gave me, nor the gaze of Europe at present fixed on you, nor your dignity as man and artist has been able to protect you against the seductions of that Court, in which intrigue, avarice, and bad faith reign supreme; that Court where you were put to shame, despised, and driven out like an unfaithful valet! It is, then, true that you are composing music for

⁶ It is common knowledge that Cellini had a singular aversion to the flute (Berlioz's note).

the Grand Duke! Even, as they say, a work that is to be greater and bolder than any yet produced by you? All musical Italy is to take part in the fête. The gardens of the Pitti Palace are being prepared for it; five hundred talented virtuosi, assembled under your direction in a large and beautiful pavilion, decorated by Michelangelo, will pour out the floods of your splendid harmony on a panting, distracted, enthusiastic audience. How admirable! And all this for the Grand Duke, for Florence, for the man and the town that have treated you so unworthily! Oh, what ridiculous simplicity was mine when I sought to cool your one day's childish anger! Oh, what marvellous simplicity made me preach chastity to a eunuch, slowness to a snail! What a fool I was!

What powerful passion can then have brought you to such a degree of abasement? Thirst for gold? You are today wealthier than I am. Love of fame? Was there ever a name more popular than that of Alfonso, from the day of the prodigious success of your tragedy of *Francesca*, and that, no less great, of the three lyric dramas succeeding it? Besides, what was there to prevent your selecting some other capital for the stage of your fresh triumph? No sovereign would have denied you what the *great* Cosimo has offered you. Today your songs are everywhere admired and loved; they resound from one end of Europe to the other; they are heard in town, at court, in the army, in the church; King Francis never tires of repeating them; Madame d'Étampes herself finds that, *for an Italian, you are not without talent*; equal justice is meted out to you in Spain; the women and more especially the priests profess in general a genuine cult for your music; and had it been your fancy to present to the Romans the work you are preparing for the Tuscans, the joy of the Pope, of the cardinals, and of the whole of the ant-hill of purple-chokered *monsignori* would doubtless have been surpassed only by the intoxication and the rapture of their innumerable harlots.

Perhaps it is pride that has seduced you . . . some ludicrous dignity . . . some empty title. . . . It is more than I can fathom.

Whatever it may be, bear in mind this: you have failed in nobility, in pride, in faith. The man, the artist, the friend, have all fallen equally in my estimation. I can bestow my affectionate regard only on upright men incapable of any mean deed; you are not one of these; my friendship is yours no longer. I gave you

money; you have chosen to return it to me; we are quits. I am leaving Paris; in a month I shall be going to Florence; forget that you ever knew me, and do not try to see me. For were it the very day of your success before the people, the princes, and the to me far more imposing assemblage of your five hundred artists, if you accosted me I should turn my back on you.

Benvenuto Cellini

Alfonso to Benvenuto

Florence, 23 June 1557

IT is indeed true, Cellini. I am indebted to the Grand Duke for an unpardonable humiliation; to you for my celebrity, my fortune, and perhaps my life. I had sworn to take vengeance on him; I have not done so. I had solemnly promised you never to accept from him either commissions or honours; I have not kept my word. It was in Ferrara that, thanks to you, *Francesca* was heard and applauded for the first time; it was in Florence that it was considered a work devoid of meaning and reason. And yet Ferrara, which asked me for my new work, did not secure it, and it is to the Grand Duke that I make a present of it. Yes, the Tuscans, formerly so contemptuous of me, rejoice at the preference I am showing them; they are proud of it; their fanaticism for me goes far beyond all you tell me about that of the French.

A regular emigration is on foot in most of the Tuscan towns. The Pisans and the Sienese themselves, forgetting their old hatreds, are already bespeaking Florentine hospitality. Cosimo, enraptured with the success of him whom he styles *his artist*, builds great hopes on the results which this renewal of harmonious relations between the three rival populations may have on his policy and government. He overwhelms me with kind attentions and flattering words. Yesterday he gave a magnificent banquet in my honour at the Pitti Palace, at which all the noble families of the town were present. The lovely Countess of Vallombrosa lavished her sweetest smiles on me. The Grand Duchess did me the honour to sing a madrigal with me. Della Viola is the man of the day, the man of Florence, the man of the Grand Duke; there is no one else.

I am most guilty, most despicable, most vile, am I not? Well, then, Cellini, should you be passing through Florence on the 28th of July next, wait for me between eight and nine o'clock in the evening at the doors of the Baptistry; I will seek you out there. And if, with my first word, I do not clear myself absolutely of all the offences you reproach me with, if I do not give you an explanation of my conduct that will satisfy you in every respect, then double your scorn of me, treat me as the lowest of mankind, trample me underfoot, strike me with your whip, spit in my face; I admit beforehand that I shall have deserved it. Until then preserve your friendship for me; you will soon see that I was never more worthy of it.

Thine,

Alfonso della Viola

On the evening of the 28th of July a man of high stature, of gloomy and discontented mien, strode through the streets of Florence towards the piazza of the Grand Duke. When he reached the bronze statue of Perseus, he stopped short and gazed at it, sunk in profound meditation; it was Benvenuto. Although the answer and the protestations of Alfonso had made little impression on his mind, he had long been united to the young composer by a friendship too sincere and too intense for it to be thus wiped out for ever in a few days' time. Hence he had not had the courage to refuse to hear what della Viola had to say in justification of his conduct; and it was on his way to the Baptistry, where Alfonso was to meet him, that Cellini had wanted to see once more, after so long an absence, the masterpiece that in former days had been the cause of so many fatigues and vexations to him. The piazza and the adjacent streets were deserted; the most profound silence reigned in this quarter, which was ordinarily so crowded and noisy. The artist, as he contemplated his immortal work, asked himself whether obscurity and a mind of the ordinary kind might not have been better for him than glory and genius.

"Why am I not a Nettuno or Porto d'Anzio drover?" he mused; "resembling the beasts in my care, I should lead a rough, monotonous life, but it would at least be free from the worries that from the days of my childhood have tormented my existence. Perfidious and jealous rivals . . . unjust or ungrateful princes . . .

venomous critics . . . brainless flatterers . . . continual alternations of successes and reverses, of splendour and of poverty . . . excessive and never-ending labours . . . never any repose, any well-being, any leisure . . . wearing out my body like a mercenary, and with my soul constantly chilled or aflame . . . is this living?"

The joyous shouts of three youthful workmen invading the piazza interrupted his meditation.

"Six florins," one of them was saying; "it is high."

"Indeed," retorted another, "had he asked for ten we should have had to put up with it. Those accursed Pisans have taken all the seats. Besides, Antonio, the gardener's cottage is only twenty paces from the pavilion; sitting on the roof, we shall be able to hear and see wonderfully; the door of the little subterranean canal is to be left open and we shall get there without any trouble."

"Pshaw!" added the third, "to enjoy hearing it we may well fast a bit for a few weeks. You know the effect produced by yesterday's rehearsal. The Court alone had been admitted; the Grand Duke and his suite never stopped applauding; the performers carried della Viola shoulder high; and in her ecstasy the Countess of Valombrosa kissed him. It will be something miraculous."

"Just look at the deserted streets; the whole town is already at the Pitti Palace. We have just time. Let us run!"

Only then did Cellini learn that the subject of their conversation was the great musical festival, the day and hour of which had come. This hardly chimed with the choice Alfonso had made of the present evening for his rendezvous. How could the *maestro* leave the orchestra to itself at such a moment and forsake the important post that meant so much to him? It was hard to imagine.

Nevertheless Benvenuto proceeded to the Baptistery, where he found his two pupils Paolo and Ascanio with some horses; he was to leave for Leghorn the same evening, thence to embark for Naples on the following day.

He had hardly been waiting a few minutes when Alfonso, pale, and with eyes aflame, stood before him, affecting a calm unusual to him.

"Cellini, you have come; I thank you."

"Well, then?"

"This is the evening."

"I know; but speak; I am waiting the explanation you promised me."

"The Pitti Palace, its grounds, its courtyards are packed; the people are jammed against the walls and jostle one another in the half-filled ponds, on the roofs, in the trees, everywhere."

"I know it."

"The Pisans have come, and so have the Sieneese."

"I know."

"The Grand Duke, the Court, and the nobility are there; the immense orchestra is in its place."

"I know."

"But the music is not there," shouted Alfonso, beside himself; "nor is the *maestro* there; do you also know that?"

"What! Tell me what this means."

"No, there is no music; I have spirited it away; and there is no *maestro*, since I am here; no, there will be no musical festival, as both the work and the composer have disappeared. A note has just informed the Grand Duke that my work will not be produced. *It no longer suits my convenience*, I wrote to him, using his very own words; *I also, in my turn, have changed my mind*. Can you now conceive the fury of these people, disappointed for the first time; these people who have left their town, their work, and spent their money to hear my music, which they are not going to hear? Before coming to join you I watched them; they were beginning to show impatience; the Grand Duke was being blamed. Do you see my plan, Cellini?"

"I can grasp it."

"Come with me; let us get fairly close to the Palace, and see my mine explode. Do you not hear already the yells, the tumult, the imprecations? Oh, my good Pisans, I know you by your insults. Can you see the stones, the branches of trees, and the broken vases flying about? No one but the Sieneese can throw them like that. Take care, or we shall be knocked over. How they run, the Florentines! They are storming the pavilion. Good! There goes a lump of mud into the ducal box; it is lucky the *great* Cosimo has left it. Down go seats, desks, benches, windows; the box and the pavilion crash to the ground. They are wrecking everything, Cellini; what a magnificent riot! Honour to the Grand Duke!!!!

Damnation! You took me for a coward. Tell me, are you satisfied? Is this revenge?"

Cellini, with clenched teeth and dilated nostrils, gazed without replying at the terrible spectacle of the popular fury; his eyes, which sparkled with a sinister flame, his square forehead, furrowed with large drops of perspiration, the almost imperceptible trembling of his limbs, testified sufficiently to the savage intensity of his joy. At last, grasping the arm of Alfonso, he said:

"I am leaving for Naples this very instant; will you come with me?"

"To the end of the world, now."

"Kiss me, then, and to horse! You are a hero."

SIEDLER: "Well, are you prepared to wager that if ever Corsino found an opportunity of being revenged in the same fashion, he would not avail himself of it? . . . It is all very well for a celebrated man who is already able to scatter his glory right and left like litter for his horses, as Emperor Napoleon said; but I defy a beginner, or even an artist who is tolerably well known, to indulge in such a luxury. No one is lunatic enough or vindictive enough. Still the joke is good. I also admire Benvenuto's moderation with regard to his dagger thrusts: 'I struck at him twice only, for at the first blow he fell dead' is really affecting."

WINTER: "Is that damned opera never going to end?" (*The prima donna emits a series of shrieks.*) "Which of you knows something amusing that will make us forget that creature's yells?"

"I do," replied Turuth, the second flautist; "I can tell you a little drama I saw in Italy, but the story is not a gay one."

"Oh, we know you are sensitive, the most sensitive of all the laureates whom the Institut de France has sent to Rome for twenty years past, for the purpose of unlearning music, if they happened to know anything about it."

"Well, if it's of the French kind," said Dervinck, "let it stir our emotions. Let us go in for ten minutes' sentiment. Of course you guarantee the truth of your story?"

"As true as I am alive!"

"Hush! Begin your yarn!"

"Here goes then!"

VINCENZA

A Sentimental Tale

ONE of my friends, by name G—, a painter of talent, had inspired with a deep love a young peasant girl of Albano, named Vincenza, who occasionally went to Rome to offer her virginal head as model to the pencils of our best artists. The naïve grace of that child of the mountains, and the candid expression of her face, had won for her a kind of worship on the part of the painters, which her proper and reserved behaviour entirely justified.

From the day when G— seemed to take pleasure in seeing her, Vincenza never left Rome; Albano, its beautiful lake, its delightful sites, were exchanged for a dark and dirty little room, which she occupied in the Trastevere in the house of a workman's wife, whose children she tended. Pretexts were not lacking to her for paying frequent visits to the studio of her *bello Francese*. I found her there one day. G— sat gravely in front of his easel, brush in hand; Vincenza, squatting at his feet like a dog at those of his master, watched his every look, drank in his slightest remark; at intervals she jumped up, went and stood in front of G—, gazed at him rapturously, flung her arms about his neck, and laughed convulsively, without making the least attempt to disguise her frenzied passion.

For several months the happiness of the young Albanesa remained cloudless, but jealousy made an end of it. G— was led to doubt the faithfulness of Vincenza; from that time he closed his door to her and stubbornly refused to see her. Vincenza, struck to the heart by this estrangement, fell into a fearful state of despair. She would sometimes wait for whole days for G— on the terrace of the Pincio, where she hoped to meet him; she rejected all consolation and became more and more sinister in her speech and abrupt in her manner. I had already attempted in vain to bring her obdurate lover back to her; when I came across her, bathed in tears, with a gloomy look in her eyes, I could but avert my gaze and go my way sighing. One day, however, I met her striding in an extraordinary state of agitation along the bank of the Tiber, on a high escarpment called Poussin's Promenade. . . .

"Whither are you going, Vincenza?—You won't answer me?—You shall not go any farther; I foresee some foolish act. . . ."

"Leave me, sir, do not stop me."

"But tell me, what are you doing here alone? . . ."

"Why, do you not know that he will no longer see me, that he no longer loves me, that he thinks I am untrue to him? How can I live after that? I came here to drown myself."

Thereupon she gave vent to despairing cries. I watched her rolling on the ground for some time, tearing her hair and hurling furious curses at the authors of her sufferings; then, when she was somewhat exhausted, I asked her if she would promise to remain calm till the following day, promising her I would make a last attempt with G—.

"Listen to me, Vincenza. I shall see him this evening and tell him everything that your unfortunate passion and the pity it inspires in me can suggest, in order to make him forgive you. Come to my house tomorrow and I will tell you the result and what remains for you to do to make him yield. If I do not succeed, then, as there will really be nothing better for you—the Tiber will still be here."

"Oh, sir, you are kind, and I will do all you tell me."

I saw G— by himself in the evening, told him of the scene I had witnessed, and begged him to grant the unfortunate girl an interview, which alone could save her.

"Get further and more serious information," I said to him in conclusion; "I can wager my right arm that you are making her the victim of a mistake. Besides, if my arguments are feeble, I can assure you that her despair is admirable and that it makes her one of the most dramatic figures imaginable; take her as a work of art."

"Come, my dear Mercury, you plead well; I surrender. In a couple of hours I will see someone who can give me a fresh light on this ridiculous business. If I have been mistaken, let her come; the key shall be in the lock. If, on the contrary, the key is not there, it will be because I have acquired the certainty that my suspicions were well grounded; in that case I beg you to let the matter drop. Let us speak of something else. What do you think of my new studio?"

"Incomparably preferable to your former one, but the outlook is less fine. Had I been in your place, I should have kept

the garret, if only to see Saint Peter's and Hadrian's tomb."

"Oh, there you are again with your nebulous ideas! Talking of clouds, just let me light my cigar. . . . Right! . . . And now good-bye; I am off to investigate; tell your protégée of my final resolution. I am curious to see which of us two has been fooled."

On the following day Vincenza called on me at early dawn. I was still asleep. At first she did not venture to break my slumber; but her anxiety getting the better of her, she took my guitar and played three chords, which roused me. Turning in my bed, I saw her beside my pillow, dying of emotion. Heavens! How pretty she was! Hope beamed in her lovely eyes. In spite of the dark tint of her skin I could see her flushing with passion; she was trembling in every limb.

"Well, Vincenza, I think he will receive you. If the key is in his door, it means that he forgives you, and—"

The poor girl interrupts me with a joyous cry, bends over my hand, kisses it frantically, bedews it with tears, moans, sobs, and rushes from my room, bestowing on me as thanks a divine smile, which illumined me like a ray from heaven. A few hours later, just as I had finished dressing, in came G—, who, looking grave, said to me:

"You were right, I have found out the truth; but why has she not been to my place? I was awaiting her."

"What! She did not go? She left here this morning half crazed with the hope I had given her; she must have been at your place in a couple of minutes."

"I did not see her; and yet the key was certainly in the lock."

"Oh, misery! I forgot to tell her that you had changed your studio. She will have gone to the fourth storey, not knowing that you are now on the first."

"Let us hurry."

We rushed to the top storey; the door of the studio was shut. We drove deeply into the wood was the silver *spada* that Vincenza wore in her hair, which G— recognized with dismay, for it had been his gift to her. We hurried to her dwelling in the Trastevere, to the Tiber, to Poussin's Promenade; we made inquiries of all the passers-by; none had seen her. Finally we heard voices and a violent exchange of words. . . . We reached the spot whence they proceeded. . . . Two drovers were fighting over the white ker-

chief of Vincenza, which the unhappy Albanesa had torn from her head and thrown on the bank before flinging herself . . .

The first violin, whistling gently between his teeth, commented: "Yours is a short story and a poor one; moreover, it can hardly be called touching. Come, French and sensitive flautist, get back to your rustic instrument. I prefer the original sensitiveness of our kettledrummer, that wild Kleiner, whose sole ambition is to be the best man in the town for the close tremolo and for the colouring of meerscham pipes. One fine day—"

"But the opera is over, keep your story for tomorrow."

"No, it is quite short; you will be able to swallow it at one gulp. One day I met Kleiner resting his elbow on a table in a café, and alone, as is his habit. He looked gloomier than usual. Going up to him, I said:

"'Kleiner, you seem very sad, what ails you?'

"'I am—I am worried!'

"'Have you again lost eleven games at billiards, as you did last week? Have you broken a pair of drumsticks or a pipe you had coloured?'

"'No, I have lost—my mother.'

"'My poor comrade, I regret having asked any questions of you, and to hear such grievous news.'

"KLEINER (*addressing himself to the waiter*): 'Waiter, a chocolate with milk.'

"'Right away, sir.'

"(*Continuing*): 'Yes, old boy, I am greatly troubled, believe me! My mother died last night, after an awful agony lasting fourteen hours.'

"THE WAITER (*returning*): 'There is no more chocolate and milk.'

"KLEINER (*violently pounding the table with his fist, and up-setting two spoons and a cup*): 'Confound it! another worry!!!'

"There you have natural sensitiveness if you like, admirably expressed!"

The musicians break into such a fit of laughter that the conductor, who has been listening to them, is compelled to take notice of it. With one eye he gives them an irritated look. The other eye smiles.

SECOND EVENING

The Strolling Harpist, a tale of today.—

The Performance of an Oratorio.—The Sleep of the Just



CONCERT is taking place at the theatre.

The program consists of an immense oratorio which the public has come to hear as a matter of religious duty, to which it listens in devout silence which the artists endure with pious fortitude, and which produces on all a feeling of frigid boredom, as sombre and oppressive as the walls of a Protestant church.

The unfortunate player of the big drum, who has no part in the work, sits in his corner, agitated and anxious. He alone dares to speak irreverently of the music, which, according to him, is by a poor composer, so ignorant of the laws of orchestration as not to make use of that monarch of instruments, the big drum.

I am seated alongside a viola, who does pretty well during the first hour. After a few minutes of the second one, however, his bow sweeps the strings listlessly; next it is dropped . . . and I feel an unusual weight on my left shoulder. It is that of the martyr's head resting there unconsciously. I move closer to my neighbour, so as to afford him a more solid and comfortable support. He falls soundly asleep. The devout listeners nearest to the orchestra look at us indignantly. Great scandal! . . . I prolong it by continuing to serve as a pillow for the musician. The musicians are all laughing.

"We shall all go to sleep," Moran says to me, "if you don't keep us awake by some means or other. Come, now, an episode of your recent trip to Germany! That is a country we love, although this terrible oratorio comes from it. You must have had more than one original adventure. Speak, and quickly; the arms of Morpheus are already spreading to enfold us."

"It looks as if tonight I must keep some of you asleep and the others awake. I will sacrifice myself, then, if needs must be; but when you repeat the story I am about to tell you—it is a little

décolleté here and there—don't say from whom you heard it; it would ruin me with the pious folk whose owl's eyes are at present bombarding me."

"Don't worry," answers Corsino, who has just come out of prison; "I will father the story."

THE STROLLING HARPIST

A Tale of Today

DURING one of my trips to Austria, when we were about a third of the distance between Vienna and Prague, my train stopped, unable to go any farther. An inundation had swept away a viaduct, and an immense length of the track was submerged and strewn with soil and rubbish; so the travellers had to resign themselves to going by vehicle a long way round, in order to re-join the other section of the broken line. The number of comfortable conveyances was small and I had to consider myself fortunate in securing a peasant's cart carpeted with a couple of trusses of straw; I was tired out and frozen when I reached the rallying-point of the train. While I was trying to get thawed in a waiting-room of the station, there entered one of those strolling harpists so numerous in southern Germany, who sometimes possess a talent superior to their lowly condition. Having taken up his position facing me in one of the corners of the room, he looked at me attentively for a few minutes; then, grasping his harp as if to tune it, he softly repeated several times, by way of prelude, the first four bars of the theme of my *Queen Mab* Scherzo; he scanned me slyly while murmuring the little melody. At first I thought that it was chance that had brought these few notes to the fingers of the harpist, and in order to satisfy myself I replied by humming the four bars following, to which, to my great astonishment, he replied quite accurately with the end of the phrase. Thereupon we both smiled and looked at each other.

"*Dove avete inteso questo pezzo?*" I asked him.

My first impulse, when in countries whose language I do not know, is always to speak Italian, imagining that in cases of this sort people who do not understand French are bound to know the only foreign tongue of which I have learnt a few words.

But my good man replied: "I do not know Italian, and so do not understand what you have done me the honour of saying."

"You speak French, then. I was asking you where you had heard that piece."

"In Vienna, at one of your concerts."

"You recognize me?"

"Very well indeed."

"By what chance and how did you manage to get to that concert?"

"One evening, in a Vienna café where I used to play, I was present at a quarrel that arose between the frequenters of the place concerning your music, a quarrel so violent that for a moment I expected to see them use stools as arguments. The point chiefly in discussion was the symphony of *Roméo et Juliette*; and I was inspired with a strong desire to hear this. So I said to myself: 'If I make more than three florins today, I shall devote one to the purchase of a ticket for tomorrow's concert.' I was fortunate enough to make three and a half florins and so was able to gratify my curiosity."

"So my Scherzo found a place in your memory?"

"I know only the first half and the last bars. I have never been able to remember the rest."

"What was the effect it produced upon you when you heard it? Tell me the truth."

"Oh, a singular, a very singular one! It made me laugh, and laugh heartily, so much so that I was unable to control my laughter. I had never thought that the familiar instruments could produce such sounds, or that an orchestra of a hundred could indulge in such amusing little capers. Great was my excitement, and I kept on laughing. When it came to the last bars, to the rapid phrase in which the violins shoot upward like an arrow, I even burst into so loud a fit of laughter that one of my neighbours wanted to have me put out, thinking I was making game of you. I was not really guilty of that—quite the contrary—but my laughter was too much for me."

"Upon my word, yours is an original way of enjoying music, and I am curious to hear how you learnt it. Since you speak French so well, and the train to Prague does not start for a couple of hours, you must have lunch with me and tell me."

"It is a very simple story, sir, and hardly worth your attention; but if you are good enough to hear it, I am at your service."

We sat down to table, the inevitable Rhine wine was brought in, we drank a few bumpers, and so here are virtually the very terms in which my guest told me the story of his musical education, or rather the events of his life.

THE STORY OF THE STROLLING HARPIST

"I WAS born in Styria; my father, like myself, was a strolling musician. After having wandered for ten years through France, where he amassed a little money, he returned to his country and took unto himself a wife. I was born a year after the marriage; eight months after my birth my mother died. My father decided never to part with me; he looked after me and brought me up in my childhood with a care of which, generally speaking, women are alone capable. Convinced that, living in Germany, I could not help learning German, he conceived the happy idea of first teaching me French, by using that language exclusively in our intercourse. He next taught me, as soon as I was strong enough, the two instruments with which he was most familiar, the harp and the rifle. You are aware that we are good shots in Styria; I soon came to be considered a good one in our village, and my father was proud of me. I had at the same time acquired a fair proficiency on the harp, when my father noticed that the progress I had been making had suddenly ceased. He asked me the reason; not wishing to tell him, I assured him that it was no fault of mine and that I was working at it daily as usual, but in the open, since I felt myself incapable of playing the harp within the walls of our poor dwelling. The truth was that I was not working at all. And this is why: I had a pretty, child's voice, strong and of good tone; the pleasure I derived from playing the harp in the woods and among the wildest sites of our country had led me to sing also, to my own accompaniment; I used to sing loudly, giving my voice the full extent of my lung-power. I would listen rapturously to the sounds as they rolled along and died away in the valleys; it gave me an extraordinary exaltation, and I would improvise the words and music of songs, half in German, half in French, in which I tried to depict the vague enthusiasm possessing me. My harp, however,

did not respond to my desires with regard to the accompaniment of these strange songs; in vain I tried twenty styles of breaking the chords; it always seemed to me so dry and paltry that one day, at the end of a couplet in which I wanted a powerful and resounding harmony, I instinctively seized my rifle, which never left my side, and shot into the air in order to get the final explosion denied me by the harp. It became still worse when I aimed at the sustained, wailing, gentle sounds that both express reverie and give birth to it; the harp showed itself more helpless than ever.

"As it was an impossibility for me to draw from it anything like that, one day when I was improvising more sadly than usual, I stopped singing, and in my discouragement remained silent, stretched on the heath with my head resting on my imperfect instrument. After a little time a strange but sweet, veiled harmony, as mysterious as echoes of the canticles of paradise, seemed to dawn on my hearing. . . . I listened in rapture . . . and I noticed that this harmony, which was coming from my harp without any apparent vibration of the strings, grew in richness and power, or diminished, according to the degree of strength of the wind. It was the wind, indeed, that produced these extraordinary sounds that I had never heard spoken of!"

"You knew nothing about the Æolian harp?"

"No, sir. I thought I had made a real discovery; it took a complete hold of my mind, and from then on, instead of practising on my instrument, I did nothing but indulge in experiments that took up my whole time. I tried twenty different ways of tuning my harp in order to avoid the confusion produced by the simultaneous vibration of so many strings; and at last I succeeded, after much searching, in tuning the greater number to the unison and the octave, doing away with all the others. Then only did I obtain the series of truly magical chords that realized my ideal; celestial harmonies to which I sang endless hymns, which bore me off into palaces of crystal, in the midst of millions of white-winged angels, crowned with stars and singing with me in an unknown tongue; another time, plunged in deep sadness, I would see in the clouds pale young girls with blue eyes, robed in their long, fair hair, more beautiful than the seraphs, who, smiling through their tears,

breathed harmonious wails that were wafted away with them by the storm to the far ends of the horizon; again, I imagined I saw Napoleon, whose astounding story my father had frequently told me; I fancied myself in the island where he had died; I saw his guard standing motionless around him; another time it was the Blessed Virgin, St. Magdalen, and our Lord Jesus Christ, in an immense church on Easter Sunday; at other times it seemed to me that I was all alone high up in the air and that the whole universe had disappeared; or else I suffered awful grief, as if I had lost beings exceedingly dear to me, and I would rend my hair, roll on the ground, and break into sobbing. I cannot express the hundredth part of what I felt. It was during one of these scenes of poetic despair that I was found one day by a party of local hunters. On seeing my tears, my bewildered looks, the strings of my harp partly unstrung, they thought me crazy, and brought me home, willy-nilly, to my father. For some time past he had imagined, from my manner and my unaccountable exaltation, that I drank brandy (I should have had to steal it, since I could not pay for it); so he did not fall in with their opinion. Convinced that I had got drunk somewhere, he gave me a good thrashing and locked me up for a couple of days on bread and water. I endured this unjust punishment without saying a word to clear myself; I felt that the truth would be neither believed nor understood. Moreover, I could not bring myself to take anybody into my confidence; I had discovered an ideal and sacred world, the mystery of which I would reveal to none. The *curé*, a worthy man of whom I have so far not told you anything, had an entirely different opinion as to my fits of ecstasy.

“‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘they are visitations of the celestial spirit. The child is probably destined to become a great saint.’”

“The time of my first communion arrived, and my harmonic visions became both more frequent and more intense. Thereupon my father began to lose the bad opinion he had conceived of me and to believe, he too, that I was insane. The *curé*, on the contrary, persisting in his own view, asked me whether I had ever thought of becoming a priest.

“‘No, sir,’ I replied, ‘but I am thinking of it now, and it seems to me that I should be very happy to enter that holy state.’”

"Well then, my child, search your heart and think it over; we will have another talk on the subject."

"In the midst of all this my father died after a short illness. I was fourteen; I felt deep sorrow over his death, for he had seldom beaten me and I owed him considerable gratitude for having brought me up and for teaching me three things: French, the harp, and the rifle. I was alone in the world. The *curé* took me to his house, and shortly afterwards, on my assuring him of my vocation for the ecclesiastical state, he began to teach me what was necessary. Five years were spent in learning Latin, and I was on the point of commencing my theological studies when one fine day I fell madly in love with two girls at one and the same time. You do not think that is possible, do you, sir?"

"Indeed I do; I can quite believe it. . . . Anything is possible in an organism like yours."

"Well, then, it was just as I tell you. . . . I loved two girls at one and the same time; the one was merry, the other sentimental."

"Like the two female cousins in *Der Freischütz*?"

"Exactly so. Oh, the *Freischütz*, there is one of my phrases in that! And in the woods, on stormy days, often—" Here the narrator stopped short and stared fixedly into the air, motionless and listening; he seemed to hear his beloved *Æolian* melodies, doubtless blended with the romantic melody of Weber he had just mentioned. His face went pale; a few tears appeared between his eyelids. . . . I took care not to disturb his ecstatic dream; I admired, nay, envied him. Both of us remained silent for a while. At last, hastily brushing the tears from his eyes, and emptying his glass, "Pardon me, sir," he resumed, "for having so rudely left you to yourself to chase remembrance for a moment. The fact is that Weber would have understood me, just as I understand him; he would not have considered me a drunkard, a lunatic, a saint. He has realized my dreams—or, better still, he has made the common herd feel some of my impressions."

"The common herd, you say," I replied. "Just look round you, comrade, and ask how many individuals there are who have noticed that phrase, the mere recollection of which has just caused you such emotion. I am sure I know the phrase you mean; it is the clarinet solo over the tremolo, in the overture. Am I not right?"

"Yes indeed; hush!"

"Well, then, quote that sublime melody to anybody you like, and you will see that out of a hundred people who have heard the *Freischütz*, there are perhaps not ten who have even noticed it."

"Most likely. Heavens! What a world! . . . Well, my two mistresses were thus the two heroines of Weber, and, what is more, one was named Annette, and the other Agatha; once more just as in the *Freischütz*! I never was able to make out which of the two I loved the more, but I was always sad with the merry one, while the melancholy one made me merry."

"Naturally; we are made like that."

"Upon my word, if I must confess it to you, I was uncommonly happy. This dual love made me forget my celestial concerts somewhat, and as to my holy vocation, it vanished in the twinkling of an eye. There is nothing like the love of two maidens, one merry, the other dreamy, to cure you of the desire to become a priest and to take away the taste for theology. The *curé* noticed nothing, Agatha did not suspect my love for Annette, or the latter my passion for Agatha, and I went on being gay or sad alternately day by day."

"The devil! You must be endowed with an inexhaustible fund of sadness and gaiety for that agreeable existence to have lasted any length of time."

"I don't know if I was as well endowed as you say, since a fresh incident, far more serious than all the preceding events of my life, came and tore me away from the arms of my dear girls and the *curé's* lessons. I was one day absorbed in a poetic reverie with Annette, who laughed most heartily at what she styled my look of *a cringing dog in the dumps*; accompanying myself on the harp, I was singing one of my most impassioned poems, improvised at a time when neither my heart nor my senses had yet spoken. I ceased singing for an instant, with my head on Annette's shoulder, and tenderly kissing one of her hands; I asked myself what could be the mysterious faculty that had made me discover in music the expression of love, long before the slightest gleam of that sentiment had been revealed to me, when Annette, finding it difficult to restrain a fresh fit of hilarity, exclaimed, kissing me: 'Oh,

how stupid you are, but it matters little to me, for I love you much more, however little you amuse me, than that queer fellow Franz, Agatha's lover.'

"Whose lover . . . ?"

"Agatha's, didn't you know it, then? He goes and sees her whenever you and I are together; she has told me all about it.'

"Perhaps you imagine, sir, that I bounded out of the house with a cry of rage, to go and exterminate Franz and Agatha. No, a bit of it; a prey to one of those cold rages that are far more terrible than frantic transports, I waited for my rival at the door of *our* mistress, and without reflecting that she was deceiving the pair of us, and that he had as much cause for complaint against me as I had against him, without even letting him suspect the cause of my aggression, I insulted him in such a fashion that we agreed to fight without witnesses on the following morning. An fight we did, sir, and I—a glass of wine, please, and I—here your health—and I put one of his eyes out."

"It was swords you fought with, then?"

"No, sir, with rifles, and at fifty paces. I put a bullet in his eye that made him one-eyed."

"And killed him, no doubt?"

"Oh, very much so; he fell dead on the spot."

"You had aimed at the left eye?"

"Alas, no, sir; I know that you will think me very clumsy . . . at fifty paces. . . . I had aimed at the right eye. . . . But when taking aim, that she-rascal Agatha came into my mind, and my hand must have shaken, for on any other occasion I swear, without vainglory, I could not have committed so awkward a mistake. Be it as it may, I no sooner saw him sprawling on the ground than my anger and my two loves flew away together. . . . My only thought was to fly from justice, which I already felt on my heels; we had fought without witnesses and I might easily be regarded as an assassin. So I was off into the mountains in a jiffy, without giving a thought to Annette and Agatha. I was cured in a moment of my love for them, just as they had cured me of my vocation for theology. This clearly proved to me, in my opinion, that the love of women is to the love of God what the love of life is to that of women, and that the only way to forget two mistresses is to put a bullet into the left eye of the first of their lovers who

comes your way. Should you ever experience a double love like mine, and it inconveniences you, I can recommend my method."

I noticed that the fellow was getting excited; he kept biting his lower lip while speaking, and laughed noiselessly in a strange way.

"You are tired," I remarked to him; "suppose we go outside and smoke a cigar; it will be easier for you by and by to resume and finish your story."

"Willingly," he replied.

Whereupon, grasping his harp, he played with one hand the entire theme of the *Queen Mab*; this seemed to restore his good humour and we went out, I muttering to myself: "What a queer fellow!" and he: "What a remarkable piece! . . ."

"I lived in the mountains for a few days," resumed my queer fellow; "my shooting generally brought me enough to live on, and the peasants never deny a sportsman a piece of bread. In the end I reached Vienna, where, very much against the grain, I sold my faithful rifle in order to buy the harp I so badly needed for earning my livelihood. From that day I adopted my father's profession and became a strolling musician. I went into the squares, into the streets, and more especially under the windows of people into whose soul I knew music had never found its way; I assailed them with my wild melodies and they always threw out a few coins in order to get rid of me. In this way I have obtained a good deal of money from Councillor K * * *, Baroness C * * *, Baron S * * *, and twenty more of the Midases who frequent the Italian opera; a Viennese artist with whom I had become acquainted had given me their names and addresses. As regards the professional lovers of music, they listened to me with interest, barring two or three; but it was very seldom that any of them gave me anything. My principal collection was taken up in the cafés of an evening, among the students and artists; this is how—as I think I told you—I was a witness of the quarrel caused by one of your compositions, a quarrel that gave birth to my wish to go and hear the *Queen Mab*. What a strange piece of music! I have since then worked frequently the market towns and villages scattered along the road you are now following, and I have repeatedly been to beautiful Prague. Ah, sir, there's a musical town for you!"

"Really?"

"You will see. But this wandering life gets tiring in the long

run; I think sometimes of my two loves, and picture to myself the pleasure it would be to forgive Agatha, even if in her turn Annette were to deceive me. Besides, I barely earn a livelihood; my harp ruins me; those confounded strings have to be renewed constantly . . . at the slightest shower they either snap or swell in the middle, with the result that the tone is impaired and they become dead and discordant. You have no idea how much it costs me."

"My dear colleague, do not complain too much. If you only knew that in the great lyric theatres there are a number of strings more costly than yours, the cost of some of them running to sixty thousand and even a hundred thousand francs; and that they deteriorate and are ruined every day, to the desperation of composers and directors! . . . There are strings of exquisite and powerful sonority that perish, just like yours, by the merest accident. A little heat, the slightest moisture, a mere nothing, and there appears that accursed swelling in the middle, which destroys all their charm and precision! As a result, how many fine works become impossible of performance! How many interests are in jeopardy! Distracted directors jump into the stage-coach and hasten to Naples, the land of fine strings, but too often in vain. It takes considerable time and much luck to replace an E string of the first quality!"¹

"That may be, sir; but your disasters are not much comfort for my tribulations; and to escape my financial embarrassment I have decided on a plan you will doubtless approve. During the last two years I have become really proficient on my instrument; I can now come out as a serious artist, and I think I ought to make money by giving concerts in the larger towns of France and in Paris."

"In Paris! Concerts in France! Ha ha! Ha ha! Let me laugh in my turn. Ha ha! What a funny fellow it is! I am not making game of you! Ha ha! My laughter is involuntary, just like the happy laugh my Scherzo gave you."

"Excuse me if I ask you what there is so funny in what I said."

"You told me, ha, ha, ha! that you expected to become rich by giving concerts in Paris. Oh, that is a really Styrian idea! Come, it is now my turn to speak, so listen to what I say. To begin with,

¹Berlioz is playing with the double meaning of certain words. The "expensive E strings" of which he is speaking are the high sopranos at the Paris Opéra. (E. N.)

in France—wait a bit, I am quite out of breath; in France, whoever gives a concert is taxed. Did you know that?"

"The devil!"

"There are men whose profession it is to take *one-eighth* of the gross receipts of all concerts, and they are even allowed the latitude of claiming one-fourth if they choose. . . . It is like this. You go to Paris, you organize at your own risk a musical *matinée* or evening; you have to pay for the hall, the lighting, the heating, the placards, the copyist, the performers. Your name being unknown, you may consider yourself fortunate if your receipts come to eight hundred francs; at the lowest your expenses amount to six hundred francs; your profits therefore should be two hundred francs; but in the end you get nothing. The tax-collector looks after these two hundred francs of yours, to which the law entitles him; he pockets them with a bow to you, for he is most polite. If, as is more than probable, you take the bare six hundred francs that cover your expenses, none the less does the collector take the eighth of that amount, so that you are fined seventy-five francs for your insolence in attempting to make yourself known in Paris and presuming to live there respectably on the product of your talent."

"Can it be possible!"

"No, indeed, it is not possible, but all the same it is. Besides, it is merely out of politeness to you that I assume your receipts will be eight hundred or even six hundred francs. Unknown, poor, and a harpist, you would not get an audience of twenty. I am telling you the naked truth. The greatest, the most famous virtuosi even, have experienced the effects of the caprice and indifference of the French public. I have been shown, in the foyer of a Marseilles theatre, a mirror smashed by Paganini in his anger at finding the house empty at one of his concerts."

"Paganini?"

"Yes, Paganini himself. Perhaps it was too hot on that day. I ought to tell you that in our country there are circumstances in which even the most extraordinary musical genius, the most astounding, the most incontestable, cannot fight his battle successfully. Neither in Paris nor in the provinces does the public sufficiently love music to face, for the sole reason of hearing it, either heat, rain, or snow, to set back or put forward a few minutes the

hour of its dinner; it only goes to the Opéra and to a concert if it can go there without any trouble—at small cost to itself, of course—and if it has absolutely nothing better to do. I am firmly convinced that it would be impossible to discover one man in a thousand who would consent to go and hear the most astonishing virtuoso, the rarest of masterpieces, if he had to listen to it alone in a dark room. There does not exist one in a thousand who, while prepared to extend some courtesy to an artist to the tune of fifty francs, would be willing to pay twenty-five francs to listen to some prodigy of art unless fashion forced him to it; for even masterpieces are occasionally the fashion. They will not sacrifice to music a dinner, a ball, or even a simple promenade, still less a horse-race or a sitting of the assizes. People go to hear an opera if it is a new one, or if the *diva* or the tenor in vogue is in it; they will go to a concert provided there is anything about it to excite their curiosity—say a bit of rivalry, a public combat between two celebrated virtuosos; it is not a question of admiring their talent, but of finding out which one of the two will be defeated; it is just another kind of point-to-point race, or a boxing-match with courteous weapons. People go and be bored in a theatre for four long hours, or, in a classical concert hall, play the most fatiguing comedy of enthusiasm, because it is the correct thing to have one's own box, and seats in it are much sought after. People go especially to certain first nights, and unhesitatingly pay an exorbitant price, if the director or the authors are playing that evening one of those fateful games that are to decide their fortune or their future. Then the interest runs high; there is no thought of studying the new work, of looking for its fine points and enjoying them; all they want to know is whether it is to be a failure or not; and according to whether chance will or will not favour it, according to whether the trend of opinion will be directed one way or the other by one of those obscure and inexplicable causes to which the slightest incident may give birth, people will boldly take the side of the stronger and crush the loser if the work is doomed, or, if it succeeds, carry the author shoulder high, without having understood the smallest particle of the work. And then, be it hot or cold, be it windy, whether it costs a hundred francs or a hundred sous, people *must* see that show; it is a battle, often even an execution! In France, my good sir, you must *train* your public just as you train racehorses;

it is a special art. There are captivating artists who will never succeed in this, while others who are absolutely mediocre are irresistible *trainers*.² Fortunate are those who possess both these two rare qualities! And yet those most marvellous in this respect occasionally meet with their masters among the phlegmatic inhabitants of certain towns of antediluvian manners, somnolent towns that have never been awakened or are committed by their indifference to art to the fanaticism of economy.

"This recalls to my mind an ancient anecdote, perhaps new to you, in which Liszt and Rubini, seven or eight years ago, cut a rather original figure. They had gone into partnership for a musical expedition against the towns of the North. Assuredly, if ever two captivating trainers³ joined hands to break in the public, it was these two incomparable virtuosi. Well then, Rubini and Liszt (understand that, Liszt and Rubini!) come to one of these modern Athens and announce their opening concert. Nothing is spared, neither marvellous puffs, nor colossal placards, nor a piquant and varied program; no, nothing; but all is in vain. The hour for the concert having arrived, our two lions enter the hall. . . . There are not fifty people there! The indignant Rubini refuses to sing, he is choking with anger. 'On the contrary,' says Liszt to him, 'you should sing at your very best; this atomic public is evidently the élite of the music-lovers in this part of the country, and you must *treat*⁴ it as such. Let us do honour to ourselves!' He sets Rubini the example, and plays the first piece magnificently. Then Rubini sings in his most disdainful *voix mixte*. Liszt returns and plays the third number; then, advancing to the edge of the platform and bowing graciously to the audience, he says: 'Gentlemen and lady' (there was only one), 'I think you have had enough music; may I now venture to ask if you will kindly come and take supper with us?' There was a moment's hesitation among the fifty subjects of the invitation; but since, all things taken into account, a proposal of this sort was alluring, they took good care not to decline it. The supper cost Liszt twelve hundred francs. The two virtuosi did not renew the experiment. There they made a

² Another of Berlioz's frequent puns—"entraînant" means both "captivating" and "training" (horses, etc.). (E. N.)

³ "*Entraîneurs entraînants*."

⁴ Again a play on words. (E. N.)

mistake, for there is no doubt there would have been a full audience at the second concert—in expectation of the supper.

“A truly masterly training,⁵ one within the reach of the smallest millionaire!

“I met one day one of our first pianist-composers, who was returning in disappointment from a seaport where he had fully reckoned on making an appearance. ‘I saw no possibility of giving a concert there,’ he said to me very seriously; ‘the herring-catch had just been unloaded, and the whole town was thinking of nothing but this precious comestible.’ How, indeed, is a man to fight against a shoal of fish?”

“You see, my friend, it is no easy matter to train one’s public, especially in the second-class towns. But having said this much of the critical sense of the big public, I must now tell you of the many low fellows who importune this wretched public, harass it, beset it shamelessly, from the soprano to the *basso profondo*, from the flageolet to the bombardon. The poorest guitar-twanger, the heaviest piano-pounder, the most grotesque warbler of inanities, aspires to fame and a competence by giving a concert even with a *jew’s-harp*. . . . Hence the torments, truly entitling them to compassion, that householders have to endure. The patrons of these virtuosi, the ticket-touts, are hornets whose sting smarts, and against whom there is no protection. They have recourse to every kind of subterfuge, to every sort of diplomatic trickiness, in order to palm off on the poor rich people a dozen of those frightful square cards known as concert tickets. And when a pretty woman has been set the cruel task of disposing of these at second hand, you should see the barbarous way she levies toll on anyone, young or old, who may have the pleasure of meeting her. ‘Mr. A., here are three tickets which Mrs. G. has asked me to hand to you; give me thirty francs. Mr. B., everyone knows you are a great musician; you once knew the tutor of Grétry’s nephew; you lived for a month at Montmorency, in a house adjoining that of the great man himself; here are a couple of tickets for a delightful concert that you cannot excuse yourself from attending; twenty francs, please. My dear, last winter I took a thousand francs’ worth of the tickets of your husband’s protégés; he will not refuse, if you ask him, to pay

for these five stall tickets; just give me fifty francs. Come now, Mr. C., you who are so truly an artist, talent should be encouraged; I feel sure you will go and hear this delightful child' (or this interesting young girl, or this good mother of a family, or this poor youth who must be snatched from military conscription, etc.); 'here are two seats; you owe me a louis, and I give you credit till this evening.'

"And so on. I know people who, throughout February and March, the months during which this scourge oppresses Paris most cruelly, keep away from drawing-rooms for fear of being robbed of every sou. I say nothing of the most familiar consequences of these terrible concerts; it is the unfortunate critics who have to endure them, and it would take too long to depict their tribulations. But of late the critics are not the only ones to suffer from them. Nowadays every virtuoso, jew's-harp player, or whatever he may be, who has *done Paris*—in other words, who has given a concert of a sort in that city (*done Paris* is their trade slang)—thinks he must go on tour, and so he pesters a number of respectable people who have not been wise enough to keep silent about their foreign friends. The point is to get *letters of introduction* out of them; to induce them to write to some innocent banker, some amiable ambassador, some generous friend of the arts, that Miss G. is going to give concerts in Copenhagen or Amsterdam, that she is gifted with a genuine talent, and beg that she be encouraged (by buying a large quantity of her tickets). These attempts have, generally speaking, the saddest results for everyone, especially for the virtuosi who have been thus recommended. Last winter I was told in Russia the story of a singer of ballads and her husband who, after *doing* St. Petersburg and Moscow without success, considered themselves none the less worthy of recommendation and begged a powerful protector to introduce them to the Sultan's Court. Constantinople had to be *done*. Only that! Liszt himself had not yet dreamt of undertaking such a journey. Russia having been icy to them, all the more reason to try their fortunes under skies the clemency of which is proverbial, and go and see if, by the greatest of hazards, the friends of music might not be the Turks.

"So here are our couple, armed with good introductions, following, as the wise men did, the treacherous star guiding them towards

the East. They reach Pera; their letters of introduction are fully honoured; the seraglio is opened to them. Madame is to be admitted to sing her ballads before the head of the Sublime Porte, before the Commander of the Faithful. What is the use of being Sultan if one is to be exposed to things of this sort? A concert takes place before the Court; four black slaves bring in a piano; the white slave, the husband, carries the singer's shawl and music. The artless Sultan, who does not expect to hear anything like what is in store for him, takes his seat on a heap of cushions, surrounded by his principal officers, and having beside him his chief interpreter. His narghile is lit for him, he blows a cloud of fragrant vapour; the singer takes her place and begins with the following ballad by M. Panseron:

*Je le sais, vous m'avez trahie,
Une autre a mieux su vous charmer.
Pourtant, quand votre cœur m'oublie,
Moi, je veux toujours vous aimer.
Oui, je conserverai sans cesse
L'amour que je vous ai voué;
Et si jamais on vous délaisse,
Appelez-moi, je reviendrai.*

"At this point the Sultan beckons to the interpreter and says to him with the laconism of the Turkish language, of which Molière has given us such fine examples in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* 'Naoum!' The interpreter translates: 'Sir, His Highness commands me to tell you that the lady would oblige him by shutting up at once.'—'But—she has hardly begun—it would be mortifying to her.'

"During this dialogue the unfortunate songstress, rolling her eyes in frenzy, continues yelping the ballad of M. Panseron:

*Si jamais son amour vous quitte,
Faible, si vous la regrettez,
Dites un mot, un seul, et vite
Vous me verrez à vos côtés.*

"A fresh sign from the Sultan, who, stroking his beard, jerks the following word over his shoulder to the interpreter: 'Zieck!' The interpreter, to the husband (the woman is still proceeding

with M. Panseron's ballad): 'Sir, the Sultan commands me to tell you that if the lady does not stop at once, he will have her thrown into the Bosphorus.'

"This time the trembling husband hesitates no longer; he claps his hand over his wife's mouth and interrupts abruptly her tender refrain:

*Appelez-moi, je reviendrai,
Appelez-moi, je—*

"A deep silence, broken only by the noise of the drops of sweat falling from the forehead of the husband on the lid of the humiliated piano. The Sultan sits motionless; our two travellers dare not withdraw. Then a new word: '*Bulak!*' springs from his lips amid a puff of tobacco smoke. The interpreter: 'Sir, His Highness commands me to tell you that he wishes to see you dance.'

"'Dance! I?'—'Yourself, sir.'—'But I am no dancer, I am not even an artist; I accompany my wife on her journeys; I carry her music, her shawl, that is all—and I could not, really.' '*Zieck! Bulak!*' again says the Sultan sharply, blowing a cloud of smoke that is full of menace. Thereupon the interpreter exclaims hurriedly: 'Sir, His Highness commands me to tell you that if you do not dance at once, he will have you thrown into the Bosphorus.' This was not the time to hesitate, and so here is our poor fellow gambolling most grotesquely, until such time as the Sultan, stroking his beard for the last time, shouts in a terrible tone: '*Daïoum be Bulak! Zieck!*' The interpreter: 'Enough, sir; His Highness commands me to tell you that you and the lady must withdraw, and leave not later than tomorrow; if ever you return to Constantinople, he will have the pair of you thrown into the Bosphorus.'

"Sublime Sultan, admirable critic, what an example you set, and why is the Bosphorus not in Paris?

"I have not heard whether the unfortunate couple pushed on to China, and if the gentle songstress had an introduction to the Celestial Emperor, supreme chief of the Middle Kingdom. It is probable, for she has never been heard of since. The husband, in that case, will have perished miserably in the Yellow River, or been promoted to be chief dancer to the Son of the Sun."

"Your last anecdote, at any rate," resumed the harpist, "proves nothing against Paris."

"What! Can't you see the logical conclusion? . . . It proves that Paris, in its continual state of fermentation, gives birth to so many musicians of all sorts, of every degree of merit, or even of none, that they either have to devour one another like the infusoria or are forced to emigrate, and that the guard on watch at the seraglio gates can nowadays no longer protect even the Emperor of the Turks from them."

"It is all very sad," said the harpist, sighing; "I see that I shall not be able to give a concert. All the same, I am determined to go to Paris."

"Oh, go to Paris; there is nothing to prevent you. Indeed, I prophesy that you will have many and excellent windfalls if only you put into practice the system so ingeniously worked out by you in Vienna, for making people who do not care for music pay for it. In this connexion I can be of great use by pointing out to you the residences of the rich people who most detest it, although by playing at haphazard in front of every house of good appearance you might be sure of success every other time. But in order to spare yourself fruitless improvisations, just take down at once the following addresses, which I guarantee are correct and of great value:

"1. Rue Drouot, facing the town hall;

"2. Rue Favart, opposite the rue d'Amboise;

"3. Place Ventadour, facing the rue Monsigny;

"4. Rue de Rivoli; I do not know the number of the house, but anybody will point it out to you;

"5. Place Vendôme; all the numbers here are excellent.

"There are many good houses in the rue Caumartin. In addition, find out the addresses of our most celebrated lions, our popular composers, the majority of our writers of opera libretti, the principal box-holders of the Conservatoire, the Opéra, and the Théâtre-Italien; all this means so much bar-gold to you. Do not forget the rue Drouot, and go there daily, for it is the general headquarters of your contributors."

I had got that far when the bell announced the departure of the train. I shook hands with the strolling harpist, and, springing into a diligence, said: "Farewell, colleague! *Au revoir* in Paris! If you are systematic and follow my recommendations, you will make

your fortune there. Once more do I specially recommend the rue Drouot to you."

"And you, think of my remedy for a dual love."

"Of course; farewell!"

"Farewell!"

The train for Prague started. For some time still I saw that Styrian dreamer leaning on his harp and gazing after me. The rumbling of the wagons prevented me from hearing him; but from the motion of the fingers of his left hand I could see that he was playing the theme of *Queen Mab*; while from that of his lips I guessed that at the very moment I was again saying: "What a queer fellow!" he was himself repeating: "What a remarkable piece of music!"

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Silence. . . . The snoring of my viola and that of the big-drum player, who has ended in following the former's example, pierces the learned counterpoints of the oratorio. From time to time the noise of the leaves being turned simultaneously by the faithful who are reading the sacred libretto makes a pleasant distraction from the somewhat monotonous effect of the voices and instruments.

"What, is it already over?" the first trombone asks me.

"You are very kind. To the merits of the oratorio is due the compliment you pay me, but my anecdote is really finished. My stories are not like this fugue, which will last, I fear, till the Day of Judgment. On with it, you executioner, go ahead! That's it, reverse your subject now! We can say of it what Madame Jourdain says of her husband: 'As big a fool from the back as from the front!'"

"Be patient," ejaculates the trombone, "there are only six more big arias and eight little fugues."

"What is to become of us?"

"Let us be just, it is irresistible. Let us all sleep!"

"All of us? No, that would not be prudent. Let us imitate the sailors, and at least leave a few men *on watch*. We will relieve them in a couple of hours."

Three double-basses are selected for the first watch, and the rest of the orchestra goes to sleep as one man.

As for me, I gently shift my viola, who seems to have inhaled a phial of chloroform, to the shoulder of the orchestra-boy, and I slip away. It is raining torrents; I hear the noise of the spouts, and I drink in this refreshing harmony greedily.

THIRD EVENING

Performance of *Der Freischütz*



O one in the orchestra speaks. Each musician is intent on his task, which he carries out zealously and lovingly. During an *entr'acte* one of them asks me if it is true that at the Paris Opéra a real skeleton was introduced in the infernal scene. I reply in the affirmative, and promise to relate the biography of the poor fellow the next day.

FOURTH EVENING

A Début in the "Freischütz," a necrological tale.

—*Marescot*, study of a knacker



VERY insipid modern Italian opera is being performed. Hardly have the musicians arrived when the majority of them, depositing their instruments, remind me of the promise I made yesterday. A circle is formed about me. The trombones and the big drum are strenuously at work. The circumstances are in our favour; we have another hour or two of duets and unison choruses. I cannot decline to tell the desired story.

The conductor, who always pretends to be ignorant of our literary diversions, leans back a little, so as to listen more easily. The prima donna has shrieked so fearful a high D sharp that we thought she was in the middle of her confinement. The public stamps with joy; two huge bouquets descend on the stage. The *diva* bows and goes off. She is recalled, returns, bows a second time, and goes off again. Recalled once more, she hastens to reappear, bows anew, and, as we do not know when this farce will end, I begin.

A Début in the "Freischütz"

IN 1822 I lived in the Latin Quarter, where I was supposed to be studying medicine. When performances were being given at the Odéon of the *Freischütz*, adapted, as you know, under the name of *Rôbin des bois* by M. Castil-Blaze, I went nightly, in spite of my studies, to hear the disfigured masterpiece of Weber. Already at that time I had all but thrown my scalpel into the bushes. One of my former fellow-students, Dubouchet, who has since risen to be one of the most sought-after doctors in Paris, often accompanied me to the theatre, for he shared my musical fanaticism. At the sixth or seventh performance a big red-haired booby who sat beside us in the parterre took it into his head to hiss Agatha's aria in the second act, alleging that it was baroque music, and that noth-

ing in the opera was any good except the waltz and the hunters' chorus. As you may guess, he was bundled outside; that was our way of discussing matters in those days; and Dubouchet, readjusting his somewhat crumpled cravat, shouted out loudly: "It is not in the least surprising, I know the fellow; he is a grocer's assistant in the rue Saint-Jacques!" And didn't the parterre applaud!

Six months later, after having done himself too well at his master's wedding-breakfast, this poor devil (the grocer's assistant) falls ill and has himself carted to the hospital of La Pitié; he is well cared for, dies, and is not buried; all this may be guessed.

Our young fellow, well cared for and duly dead, comes by chance under the eyes of Dubouchet, who recognizes him. The pitiless medical student of La Pitié, instead of shedding a tear over his vanquished enemy, cannot purchase the corpse too quickly, and, handing it to the attendant of the operating-room, he says to him: "François, here you have a subject for *dry preparation*; let it be carried out carefully; he is an acquaintance of mine."

Fifteen years roll by (fifteen years! how long life seems when one does nothing with it!), the manager of the Opéra entrusts me with the composition of the recitatives in the *Freischütz* and the staging of the masterpiece, Duponchel being once more commissioned to look after the costumes—

("Duponchel!" simultaneously exclaim five or six musicians; "do you mean the celebrated inventor of the dais, the man who introduced the dais into operas, as the principal element of success? The author of the dais in *La Juive*, in *La Reine de Chypre*, in *Le Prophète*, the creator of the floating dais, the wonderful dais, the dais of daises?")

The very same, gentlemen; and so, as Duponchel was once more in charge of the costumes, processions, and dais, I called on him to find out his plans for the properties in the infernal scene, wherein his dais, unfortunately, could not have a place.

"By the way," said I to him, "we need a skull for the evocation of Samiel, and skeletons for the apparitions; I hope you are not going to give us a pasteboard skull, nor skeletons of painted canvas like those in *Don Giovanni*."

"My good friend, there is no other way of doing it; it is the only process known."

"What! The only process! Suppose I supply you with something natural, substantial, a real skull, a real man, with bones, but no flesh on them, what will you say?"

"Upon my word, I shall say—that it is excellent, perfect; I shall find your process admirable."

"Well, then, you may depend on me, you shall have just what we want!"

Thereupon I jump into a gig and drive quickly to the house of Dr. Vidal, another of my former operating-room comrades. He too has made his fortune; it is only physicians who make a living.

"Have you a skeleton you can lend me?"

"No, but here is a fairly good head, which, I am told, once belonged to a German physician who died of misery and grief; do not spoil it, I value it greatly."

"Don't worry; I will be responsible for it."

I place the doctor's skull in my hat, and off I go.

On the boulevard, fate, which delights in pranks of this kind, brought me face to face with Dubouchet, whom I had lost track of, and the sight of him inspired me with a brilliant idea.

"Good-day!"

"How are you?"

"Very well, I thank you; but never mind me, that is not the question. How is your music-lover?"

"What music-lover?"

"Why, of course, the grocer's assistant whom we bundled out of the Odéon for having hissed Weber's music, the one who was so excellently 'prepared' by François."

"Ah, I understand; he is in the best of health. Why, yes, he stands clean and neat in my consulting-room, quite proud of being so artistically jointed and built up. Not a joint is missing, it is a masterpiece. Only the head is damaged a little."

"Well, then, give him to me; he is a youth with a future. I want to introduce him into the Opéra; there is a part for him in the new work."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see!"

"Ah, well, it's a theatrical secret, and since it is to be explained

to me very soon, I do not insist on knowing it. The music-lover shall be sent to you."

No time is lost in conveying the dead man to the Opéra, but in a case far too short for him. I hail the general utility man.

"Here, Gattino!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Open this case. You see that young man?"

"I do, sir."

"He is to make his début at the Opéra tomorrow. Prepare for him a nice little box in which he can be comfortable and stretch his legs."

"Yes, sir."

"As for his costume, take an iron rod and plant it in his backbone, so that he may hold himself as straight as M. Petipa when meditating a pirouette."

"Yes, sir."

"You will next fasten four candles together, which you will place in his hands lighted; he is a grocer, they will be familiar to him."

"Yes, sir."

"But as his head is not in the best of condition—you can see it has been a bit chipped—we must change it for this other one."

"I follow you, sir."

"It once belonged to a scientist—that doesn't matter—who died from starvation—nor need that concern us! As to the other skull, that of the grocer, who died of indigestion, you will make a slight slit on its very top (don't be afraid, nothing will come out of it) so that it may receive the point of Gaspard's sword in the evocation scene."

"All right, sir."

My orders were executed, and from that time, at every performance of the *Freischütz*, just as Samiel exclaims: "I am here!" a thunderclap is heard, a tree crashes to earth, and our grocer, who was once so hostile to Weber's music, appears amid the crimson glimmer of Bengal lights, enthusiastically brandishing his lighted torch.

Who could have foreseen the dramatic vocation of the fellow? Who ever could have thought that he might some day make his

début precisely in that very opera? He has a better head now, and more good sense; no longer does he hiss.

. *Alas, poor Yorick!*
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"Well, now, that makes me feel sad," said Corsino naïvely. "For all his having been a grocer, this débutant was almost a man, when all is said. I don't like playing thus with death. If in his lifetime he hissed Weber's score, I know people far more guilty whose remains have not been vilified with such cynical impiety. I too have lived in Paris, and in the Latin quarter at that; and there I have seen at his operations one of those wretches who, taking advantage of the impunity allowed them by French law, practise infamous abuses on musical works. There are people of all sorts in this Paris of ours. We see some of them who get their bread at street corners. Others earn their bread by night, a lantern in one hand and a hook in the other; some comb out the gutters for their food; others tear posters and sell them to paper-merchants; more useful are the men who kill and skin old horses at Montfaucon.

"The fellow I am speaking of killed and skinned the works of celebrated composers.

"Marescot by name, his trade was to *arrange* all kinds of music for two flutes, or a guitar, or especially for two flageolets, and then publish it. Since the music of the *Freischütz* did not belong to him (everyone knew that it *belonged* to the author of the libretto and of the improvements this had been subjected to in order to make it worthy to figure in the *Robin des bois* at the Odéon), Marescot did not dare practise his trade on that. This broke his heart, for, he would say, he had *an idea* which, applied to a certain part of that opera, would bring him in big money. I occasionally saw this practitioner, and I do not know how he had come to take a liking to me. Our musical inclinations were nevertheless not the same, as you can imagine, I hope. Consequently I allowed him to suspect that I appreciated him at his own valuation. On one occasion I so far forgot myself as very nearly to tell him what I thought of his industry. This embroiled us somewhat, and for six months I did not set foot in his workshop.

"Notwithstanding all his outrages on the great masters, his appearance was rather wretched and his clothing decidedly ragged.

One fine day, however, I met him stepping out briskly under the arcades of the Odéon in a brand-new frock-coat and high boots, and wearing a white tie; I even think that, so greatly had fortune transformed him, his hands were clean on that day.

"'Heavens!' I exclaimed, absolutely dazzled at the sight of him, 'have you had the misfortune to lose a rich American uncle, or to have become someone's collaborator in a new opera of Weber, that I behold you so spruce, so bright-coloured, so astounding?'

"'I!' he replied, 'a collaborator? What next? I need no collaborator; I elaborate Weber's music without any help, and I am thriving very well over it. This puzzles you; well, let me tell you that I have realized my idea, and I was not mistaken when I told you that it was worth much money, very much money, extraordinarily much money. It is Schlesinger, the Berlin publisher, who owns the *Freischütz* music in Germany; he was fool enough to purchase it, the simpleton. It is true that he did not pay a high price for it. Now, as long as Schlesinger did not publish that baroque music, it remained the sole property, here in France, of the author of *Robin des bois*, owing to the words and improvements with which he had adorned it, and I found it impossible to touch it. But as soon as it was published in Berlin, it became public property here, no French publisher having been willing, as you may well believe, to pay the Prussian publisher for rights in the property in such a work. I was now free to snap my fingers at the French *author's* rights, and to publish my piece without any words, pursuant to my own idea. I refer to Agatha's prayer in A flat, in the third act of *Robin des bois*. You are aware that it is in three-four time, and the pace lulling, and it is accompanied by syncopated horn-parts that are very difficult and as stupid as can be. I said to myself that by putting the song into six-eight time and marking it *allegretto*, and by accompanying it intelligibly—that is, with the rhythm proper to that time (a crotchet followed by a quaver, the rhythm of the drums in quick march)—it would make a pretty piece, which would be bound to meet with success. In that style, therefore, I wrote my piece for flute and guitar, and published it, allowing Weber's name to stand on it. Now it has caught on so well that I am selling it, not by hundreds, but by thousands, and its sale increases daily. It alone will bring me in more than the entire opera brought that blockhead of a Weber, or even M. Castil-Blaze, who is never-

theless a very clever fellow. That's what it is to have ideas!

"What have you to say to that, gentlemen? I feel almost sure that you will take me for a historian and not believe me. And yet I have told you an absolute fact. I may add that I have kept for a long while a copy of Weber's prayer thus transfigured by the *idea*, so as to make the *fortune*, of M. Marescot, French publisher of music, professor of the flute and guitar, in business in the rue Saint-Jacques, at the corner of the rue des Mathurins, in Paris."

The opera is over; the musicians file away, gazing at Corsino with a look of mocking unbelief. Some even allow the vulgar word *humbug* to escape their lips.

I can vouch, however, for the authenticity of his story, for I knew Marescot. He has a good deal more of the same kind to his credit!

FIFTH EVENING

The S of "Robert le Diable," a grammatical tale



VERY insipid modern French opera is being given. No one in the orchestra thinks of his part; everybody is talking, except a first violin, the trombones, and the big drum. On spying me, Dimsky, the double-bass, thus addresses me:

"Bless me! What has become of you, my dear sir? We have not set eyes on you for nearly a week. You look sad. I hope you have not had any *worry* similar to that of our friend Kleiner."

"No, thank heaven; I have not to mourn any loss in my family; but, as the Catholics say, I have been *in retreat*. In cases of this kind, devout persons, in order to prepare themselves without distraction for the performance of some important religious duty, retire into a convent or seminary, where, for a more or less long time, they fast, pray, and give themselves up to holy meditations. Now, I must confess to you that it is my yearly habit to make a poetical *retreat*. I shut myself in at home and read Shakspeare or Virgil—sometimes both. This makes me feel somewhat poorly at first; next I sleep twenty hours on end, and then I am myself again, while all that remains is an insurmountable sadness, the aftermath of which you now see, and which your merry talks will not be long in dissipating. What has been performed, sung, said, and told in my absence? Pray bring me up to date."

"We have performed *Robert le Diable* and *I Puritani*; there has been no singing whatever, and all we did in the orchestra was to indulge in discussions. The last one arose in connexion with a passage in the gambling-scene in Meyerbeer's opera. Corsino insists that the Sicilian knights have come to a unanimous agreement to rob Robert. I maintain that the author of the libretto did not mean to brand them with so shameful a character, and that their aside:

Nous le tenons! nous le tenons!

is a liberty on the translator's part. We were waiting for you, to

learn what are the French words sung by the chorus in the original text."

"They are the very same; your translator has no incorrectness to reproach himself with."

"I was sure of it," resumes Corsino; "I have won my bet."

"That is so, and the affair is another illustration of the luck of M. Meyerbeer, the happiest of composers in this vale of tears. You must admit that there is very little difference between what it is agreed to style theatrical *games*, and games of chance; the most cunning combinations are no guarantee of your success; you win because you have not lost, and lose because you did not win. These two reasons are the only ones that can be given for losses or winnings, for success or reverse. Chance, fortune, luck, are merely words for the unknown and for ever unknowable cause. But this luck, this good fortune, this *fortune propitious or not* (as Bertram has the naïveté to call it in *Robert le Diable*) none the less seems to attach itself to certain gamesters, to certain authors, with incredible obstinacy. A composer, for instance, *has marked his card* for ten years, has counted all the series of *rouges* and *noires*, has prudently resisted all the allurements of ordinary chances and the temptations they subjected him to; and then, when one fine day he sees *noire* make its appearance thirty times in succession, he says to himself: 'My fortune is made; none of the operas produced so long ago are any longer in favour; the public needs a success, my score is written in a style exactly the opposite of that of my predecessors; I play on *rouge*.' The wheel goes round, *noire* comes out for the thirty-first time, and his work falls flat. Such things happen even to people whose profession it is to write vulgarities, a lucrative profession, as everybody knows, which is generally successful in all countries. On the other hand, such are the extravagant caprices of the blind goddess that we see fine works, masterpieces, grand, new, and bold conceptions succeed brilliantly and without fail.

"Thus we have seen at the Paris Opéra, for these ten years now, a fair number of mediocre works reaping mediocre success only; we have heard others, of equally little account, whose success has been equally null, while *Le Prophète*, who marked his card at the green baize-covered table for at least twelve, thirteen, or fourteen years, *Le Prophète*, who never found that the series of de-

funct operas was considerable enough, having at last succeeded in marking his thirty-first *noire*, made exactly the same calculation as the poor devil of whom I spoke just now, and went and put his stake on red—and red came out! The fact is that the author of *Le Prophète* has not only the luck to have talent, but also the talent to have luck. He succeeds as well in small as in great things, his inspirations, his clever combinations, as in his distractions. For instance, the luck that befell him when composing *Robert le Diable*. M. Meyerbeer, when writing the first act of his famous score, did not notice, when he came to the scene in which Robert throws dice with the young Sicilian knights, an undoubtedly badly formed *s* in the manuscript of M. Scribe, the author of the libretto. The consequence was that when the gamester, exasperated at his previous losses, stakes *both his horses and his sets of armour*, the composer took the answer of Robert's partners to be: '*Nous le tenons!*' instead of '*Nous les tenons!*' and so gave the words placed in the mouth of the Sicilians a mysterious and jeering emphasis, applicable only to rascals rejoicing over the good haul they are about to make in plucking a gull. Later on, M. Scribe, when attending the first stage rehearsals, heard the chorus singing in a low tone, accentuating each syllable, this droll mistranslation: '*Nous-le-tenons, nous-le-te-nons,*' instead of the biting exclamation of the bold gamesters replying with a '*Nous les tenons*' to Robert's offer to stake his horses and sets of armour. 'What on earth is this?' he exclaimed (so they say); 'my knights indeed take the wager, but they do not take Robert; the dice are not loaded, my knights are not knights of the road. You must get that right . . . that . . . but . . . just let me see. . . . Well! . . . upon my word . . . no . . . let the mistake stand; it adds to the dramatic effect. Yes, *Nous le tenons*, the idea is funny, excellent, and the parterre will be moved; kind souls will be touched, and say: "Oh, that poor Robert! Oh, those cutpurses! What scoundrels! They understand one another like thieves at a country fair; they are going to rob him of everything!"' And the *s* was not restored; the misinterpretation enjoyed a wild success, and the Sicilian knights remained charged with and convicted of roguery; they are disgraced throughout Europe just because M. Meyerbeer is short-sighted."

One more proof that whatever has the least connexion with the stage must have either good luck or bad!

The most marvellous part of the business is that M. Scribe, who is as envious as a tiger when it is a question of inventing some good joke on the public, has not been willing to give his collaborator the credit for this find, but has actually erased the *s* from his manuscript; hence you may read in the printed libretto of *Robert le Diable* the "*Nous le tenons*" that the public so dearly loves, in lieu of "*Nous les tenons*," which is dearer still to good sense. . . .

SIXTH EVENING

The Tenor's Revolution around the Public,
an astronomical study. — *Kleiner junior's Worry*



PERFORMANCE of a very insipid modern German opera. General conversation. "Ye gods!" exclaims Kleiner junior as he enters the orchestra; "how is it possible to stand such worries! Isn't it enough that one should have to endure so wretched a work, without having it sung by that infernal tenor? What a voice! What a style! What a musician, and what pretensions!"

"Shut up, you hater of mankind!" retorts Dervinck, the first oboe; "you will end in being as wild as your brother, whose tastes and ideas you share. Do you not know, then, that a tenor is a being apart, one who holds the power of life and death over the works he sings, over the composers, and consequently over poor devils of musicians like ourselves? He is not one of the world's inhabitants, he is a whole world in himself. Nay, more, the dilettanti go so far as to deify him, and he so seriously looks upon himself as a god that he is for ever talking of his *creations*. Come, look at this book I have just received from Paris, and you will see how this luminous world revolves around the public. You, who are everlastingly delving into Humboldt's *Cosmos*, will be able to understand the phenomenon."

"Read it out to us, young Kleiner," say the majority of the musicians; "if you read properly, you shall have a milk-chocolate."

"You mean it?"

"We do, indeed."

"With pleasure, then."

The Tenor's Revolution Around the Public

Before Dawn

THE obscure tenor is in the hands of a clever professor, who is full of knowledge, patience, sentiment, and taste, and who makes him in the first place a first-rate reader and a good harmonist, gives him a broad, pure method, initiates him into the beauties of masterpieces—in a word, moulds him in the grand style of singing. Hardly has the tenor caught a glimpse of the emotional power with which he is endowed when he aspires to sit on the throne; in spite of his teacher, he is bent on making his début and reigning supreme; and yet his voice is not yet formed. A second-class theatre opens its doors to him; he makes his début and is hissed. Incensed at the outrage, the tenor breaks his engagement by mutual consent and, his heart full of contempt for his fellow-countrymen, hies himself to Italy.

There he meets with dreadful obstacles in the way of his début, but in the end he succeeds in overcoming them; he meets with a pretty fair reception. His voice is transformed, becoming full, strong, penetrating, fitted to the expression of violent passions as well as to that of the softest sentiments; its timbre gradually acquires purity, freshness, and a delightful candour; these qualities finally combine to make a talent whose influence is irresistible. Success comes to him. The Italian directors, who are good business men, sell, repurchase, resell the poor tenor, whose paltry emoluments never vary, in spite of his making the fortune of two or three theatres a year. He is exploited and squeezed in a thousand different ways, so much and so often that in the end his thoughts turn towards his own country again. He forgives it and even goes so far as to admit that it was right in being severe in the matter of his beginning. He is aware that the director of the Paris Opéra has his eye on him. He accepts the offers made to him on the latter's behalf, and so he crosses the Alps again.

Sunrise

The tenor makes a fresh début, this time at the Opéra, and before a public predisposed in his favour by his Italian triumphs. Exclamations of surprise and pleasure greet his first melody; from

then on, his success is assured. This, however, is merely the prelude to the emotions he is to stir before the close of the evening. The audience has admired the union of feeling and method with an organ of enchanting sweetness; there remain to be heard the dramatic accents, the outbursts of passions. A number comes during which the daring artist, *accentuating each syllable*, gives out some high chest notes with a resonance, an expression of heart-rending grief, and a beauty of tone that so far no one had been led to expect. Silence reigns in the stupefied house, people hold their breath, amazement and admiration are blended in an almost similar sentiment, *fear*; in fact, there is some reason for fear until that extraordinary phrase comes to its end; but when it has done so triumphantly, the wild enthusiasm of the audience may be guessed. . . .

We reach the third act. An orphan comes back to his father's thatched cottage; his heart, seared with a hopeless love, and his senses, affected by the blood and slaughter that war has forced him to see, collapse under the load of the most distressing contrast conceivable. For his father is dead; the cottage is empty; all is still and silent; it is peace, it is the grave. And the bosom on which it would be so dear for him to shed tears of filial piety in such a moment, the heart beside which his own could alone beat with less pain, is separated from him by the infinite. . . . *She* will never be his. . . . The situation is poignant, and worthily treated by the composer. Here the singer reaches a height of which no one could have thought him capable; he is sublime. Then, from two thousand panting chests, break forth cheers such as an artist hears only twice or thrice in his lifetime, cheers that repay him sufficiently for his long and arduous labours.

Then bouquets, laurel wreaths, recalls; two days later the press, overflowing with enthusiasm, broadcasts the name of the radiant tenor to all points of the globe where civilization has penetrated.

It is then, were I a moralist, that I might entertain the notion of addressing a homily to the triumphant tenor, in the style of the speech of Don Quixote to Sancho when that worthy squire was about to take possession of the government of Barataria:

"You have reached your goal," I would say. "In a few weeks you will be famous; frantic applause will be yours, and likewise endless engagements. Authors will pay court to you; no longer will

directors keep you waiting in their ante-rooms, and should you write to them, your letters will be answered. Women whom you do not even know will speak of you as of a protégé or an *intimate friend*. Books of prose and verse will be dedicated to you. Instead of a hundred sous, you will have to give your house-porter one hundred francs on New Year's Day. You will be dispensed from serving in the National Guard. From time to time you will be granted leave, during which there will be a regular scramble among provincial towns for your performances. Flowers and sonnets will be heaped about your feet. You will sing at the Prefect's evenings, and the Mayor's wife will send you apricots. You are on the threshold of Olympus at last; for if the Italians call their women-singers *dive* (goddesses), it naturally follows that the great men-singers are gods. Well, then, since you have now risen to be a deity, remain a good fellow in spite of everything; do not show too much contempt for the people who will offer you good advice.

"Remember that the voice is a fragile instrument, which may change or vanish at any moment, often without any known reason; that an accident of that kind is sufficient to hurl the greatest of the gods from his high throne and reduce him to mortal rank, and sometimes even lower than that.

"Do not be too hard on the poor composers.

"When, from the height of your elegant carriage, you see in the street Meyerbeer, Spontini, Halévy, or Auber afoot, do not greet them with a slight nod of patronizing friendship, over which they would laugh pityingly, and which passers-by would indignantly look upon as supreme impertinence on your part. Do not forget that several of their works will be admired and full of vitality when the memory of your high C from the chest is a thing of the past.

"Should you visit Italy once more, do not get infatuated with some mediocre weaver of cavatinas and, on your return, palm him off as a classic, telling us with an impartial air that Beethoven *also possessed talent*; for no god can escape ridicule.

"When you accept new roles, do not allow yourself to make any change in them unless by leave of the author. Learn that a single note added, curtailed, or transposed may make a melody commonplace and distort its expression. Besides, this is a right that cannot be yours in any circumstance. To modify the music one sings,

or the book one is translating, without saying a word about it to the man who wrote it only after much thought, is to commit a shocking breach of trust. People who borrow *without notification* are called thieves; unfaithful interpreters are calumniators and assassins.

"If by any chance there should arise a rival whose voice has more bite and power than your own, do not, when singing a duet with him, play at seeing which of you has the stronger lungs; take it for granted that you must not fight the iron pot, even if you are a bit of china porcelain.

"When on tour in the provinces, beware also of saying to the provincials, when you are speaking of the Opéra and its chorus and orchestra: *My theatre, my chorus, my orchestra*. Provincials do not enjoy any more than Parisians do being taken for fools; they know full well that you belong to the theatre, not the theatre to you, and they would find your fatuous conceit the acme of the grotesque.

"And now, friend Sancho, receive my blessing; go and govern Barataria; it is a rather low-lying island, but perhaps the most fertile on earth. Your people have a very mediocre civilization; encourage public education, so that in a couple of years' time they will no longer be suspicious, as of accursed sorcerers, of those who can read; do not take too seriously the flattery of those you may admit to your table; forget your damnable proverbs; do not worry when you have an important speech to deliver; never break your word; may those who entrust their interest to you feel secure that you will not betray them; and may your voice always be in tune¹ for all the world!"

The Tenor at his Zenith

His salary is one hundred thousand francs, with a month's leave annually. After his first role, which brought him a dazzling success, the tenor attempts a few others with varied results. He then accepts some that he gives up after three or four performances, if he does not excel in them as he did in his former roles. By so doing he may destroy the career of a composer, annihilate a masterpiece, ruin a publisher, and do enormous harm to the theatre. Considerations of this kind do not disturb his peace of mind. Art to him is

¹ Another play on words; "*juste*" means both "just" (in the sense of justice) and "musically in tune." (E. N.)

nothing but gold and wreaths, and the means the most likely to secure both quickly are in his eyes the only ones he need employ.

He has noticed that certain melodic formulæ, certain vocalizations, certain ornaments, certain *fortissimi*, commonplace phrase-endings, and ignoble rhythms have the property of spontaneously drawing applause of a sort; this reason seems to him more than sufficient for him to have recourse to such devices, nay, to insist on the composer's supplying them in his roles, regardless of all respect for expression, originality, or dignity of style, and to show his hostility towards productions of a loftier and more independent nature. He knows the effect of the old methods he is in the habit of using. He is ignorant of the effect of the new methods suggested to him, and, since he does not consider himself as an interpreter, disinterested in the matter, he abstains when in doubt, as much as lies in his power. The weakness of a few composers who have given in to his unreasonable demands has already made him dream of introducing into our theatres the musical practices of Italy. It is in vain that he is told:

"'Maestro' means 'the Master'; that appellation has been rightly conferred on the composer; it is *his* conception that should influence the audience solely and freely, through the medium of the singer; it is he who dispenses light and projects shadows; it is he who is king and answerable for his acts; he proposes and disposes; his ministers must have no other object, be eager for no other merits, than those of grasping his plans, and, by placing themselves exactly at his point of view, ensuring the realization of them."

(Here the reader's entire audience shouts "Bravo!" and so far forgets itself as to applaud. The tenor on the stage, who just then was yelling out of tune more than usual, takes the applause to himself, and bestows a gratified look on the orchestra. . . . The reader continues:)

The tenor will not listen to advice; noisy applause in drum-major style is a necessity to him; for ten years he hawks through theatres south of the Alps hackneyed themes intersected by pauses during which he can hear himself applauded, mop his forehead, arrange his hair, cough, and swallow a barley-sugar lozenge. Or else he insists on insane vocalises, varied with threatening, angry, or tender accents, and diapered with low notes, shrill sounds, warblings of humming-birds, guinea-fowl screeches, rockets, arpeggios, and trills.

Whatever the meaning of the words, the character of the part, the situation, he takes the liberty of accelerating or slackening the *tempo*, of adding scales of all sorts, embellishments of every species, and ahs and ohs that make the phrase grotesque; he dwells on short syllables, gallops through long ones, makes light of elisions, introduces aspirate *h*'s where none exist, and takes breath in the middle of a word. No longer does anything shock him; all is well, provided it favours the emission of one of his favourite notes. Is one absurdity more or less going to be noticed in such good company? The orchestra says nothing, or merely what he wants; the tenor is dominant and tramples on everything; he struts on the stage with the air of a conqueror; his panache sparkles with joy on his vainglorious head; he is king, hero, demigod, god. But it is impossible to discover whether he is weeping or laughing, whether he is in love or in anger; there is no more melody, no expression, no common sense, no drama, no music; there is simply an emission of vocal sounds, and this alone matters; this is the great thing; he goes to the theatre to hunt the public as others go to the forest to hunt the stag. Forward boldly! Let us give tongue! Tally-ho! Tally-ho! Art be our quarry!

Very soon the example of this vocal fortune makes the exploitation of the theatre an impossibility; it awakens and fosters mad hopes and ambitions among all the singing mediocrities. "The leading tenor draws one hundred thousand francs; why," says the second tenor, "should I not get eighty thousand?"—"And I fifty thousand?" retorts the third.

To feed this gaping pride, to fill up these chasms, the director vainly cuts down the expenses of the rest of the company, discredits and destroys orchestra and chorus by giving the artists composing them porters' wages; vain are his efforts, useless his sacrifices; and one fine day when, seeking to know exactly how he stands, he attempts to compare the enormousness of the tenor's salary with his task, he shudders at the following curious result:

The first tenor, with a salary of a hundred thousand francs, singing approximately seven times a month, consequently appears in eighty-four performances a year, thus receiving a little over eleven hundred francs an evening. Taking a role comprising eleven hundred notes or syllables, this represents one franc a syllable.

Thus, in *Guillaume Tell*:

Ma (1 fr.) *présence* (3 fr.) *pour vous est peut-être un outrage*
(9 fr.).

Mathilde (3 fr.), *mes pas indiscrets* (5 fr.)

Ont osé jusqu'à vous se frayer un passage (13 fr.)!

Total, thirty-four francs.—You talk gold, my lord!

Given a prima donna whose wretched salary is forty thousand francs, Mathilde's answer of course *comes cheaper* (commercial style), each one of her syllables *running up to* a mere eight sous, but even that is not so bad.

On pardonne aisément (2 fr., 40 c.) *des torts* (16 sous) *que l'on partage* (2 fr.).

Arnold (16 sous), *je* (8 sous) *vous attendais* (32 sous).

Total, eight francs.

And then he pays, goes on paying, and for ever; so much so that a day comes when he pays no more, but sees himself compelled to close his theatre. As his brother-directors are in a no more flourishing condition, some of the immortals have to resign themselves to teaching solfeggi (those who know them!) or singing to a guitar in the public squares, with four candle-ends and a green carpet.

The Sun Sets—Stormy Skies

The tenor's day is passing into the shadows; no longer can his voice ascend or descend. He has to decapitate every phrase, and can now sing only in his middle register. He plays fearful havoc with the old scores, and imposes an insupportable monotony on the new ones as a condition of their existence. His admirers are disconsolate.

Composers, poets, or painters who have lost the sense of beauty and truth, whom vulgarism no longer shocks, who have not even the strength to follow up the ideas that fly from them, whose only delight is to set traps under the feet of their active and flourishing rivals—these are already dead and buried. And yet they harbour the belief that they are still alive, a happy illusion which affords them encouragement; they mistake exhaustion for fatigue, impotence for moderation. But the loss of an organ! Who is there who could deceive himself regarding so great a misfortune, more

especially when the loss is that of a voice once marvellous in its range and strength, the beauty of its intonations, the modifications of its timbre, its dramatic expression, its perfect purity? I have sometimes been moved to deep pity for these unfortunate singers, and filled with a great indulgence for the caprices, vanities, exactions, immoderate ambitions, exorbitant pretensions, and infinite absurdities of some among them. They live but a day, and die for all time. Hardly do even the names of the most famous of them survive, and these owe their rescue from oblivion to the celebrity of the masters whose interpreters they have been, and only too frequently unfaithful ones at that. We know of Caffarelli because he sang at Naples in the *Tito* of Gluck; the memory of Mesdames Saint-Huberti and Branchu has been preserved in France because they created the roles of Dido, of the Vestal, of Iphigenia in Tauris, and so on. Which of us would have ever heard of the *diva* Faustina were it not for Marcello, who was her teacher, and for Hasse, who married her? Let us forgive, therefore, these mortal gods for making their Olympus as brilliant as they can, for imposing on the heroes of art such long and woeful trials, and for being inappeasable in any other way than by sacrifices of ideas.

It is cruel for them to see the star of fame and fortune disappearing for ever on the horizon. How painful a festal day is that of a last performance! How broken in heart must the great artist be when he treads the stage and the recesses of the theatre of which he was so long the tutelary spirit, king, absolute sovereign! Dressing himself in his room, he soliloquizes: "I shall never enter it again; this helmet with its brilliant panache will adorn me no more; never again will this mysterious casket open its lid to receive the perfumed notes of fair enthusiasts!" A knock; it is the call-boy, who has come to tell him that the performance is about to begin. "Well, my poor lad, you will be safe henceforth from my ill temper! No more of my abuse or my blows to fear! No longer will you come to me and say: 'The overture has begun, sir. The curtain is up, sir! The first scene is over, sir! Your turn to go on, sir! They are waiting for you, sir!' Alas, no! It is I who now say to you: 'Santiquet, take off my name, which is still on the door; Santiquet, carry these flowers to Fanny; go with them at once; she would not care for them tomorrow; Santiquet, drink this glass of Madeira and remove the bottle; no more shall you have to

drive off the boys of the chorus in order to defend it; Santiquet, just make a parcel of these old wreaths, take away my little piano, extinguish my lamp, lock my dressing-room door; all is over.' "

Bowed down under the load of these sad thoughts, the virtuoso makes his way to the wings; he meets the second tenor, his particular enemy, his understudy, who outwardly weeps copiously, but laughs inwardly till the tears well from his eyes.

"Well, *my dear old chap*," says the demigod to him in a doleful voice, "so you are leaving us? But what a triumph is in store for you this evening! It is a great evening!"

"Yes, for you," replies the leading singer gloomily; and turning his back on him, "Delphine," he says to a pretty little dancer whom he has allowed to worship him, "give me *my* sweetmeat-box."

"Oh, *my* sweetmeat-box is empty," retorts the wanton creature, spinning round on one foot, "I have given all the sweets to Victor."

And yet he must stifle grief, despair, fury, for he must smile and sing. The tenor is on the stage; he is playing for the last time the work he made a success, the part he *created*; he casts a final glance at the scenery which has reflected his glory, which has so often resounded with his tender accents, his passionate outbursts, on the lake on whose shore he has waited for Mathilde, on the Grütli, from which he has shouted *Liberty!*—on the pale sun that for so many years he has seen rise at nine o'clock at night. He would like to cry, to sob his heart out; but he gets his cue, his voice must not tremble, the muscles of his face must express no other emotion than that of the part; the public is there, thousands of hands are prepared to applaud you, my poor little deity; should they remain folded, you would discover that the heart's sorrow you have just been through and overcome is nothing compared to the awful anguish of the public's indifference on an occasion like this; the public, yesterday your slave, is today your master, your emperor. Now then, make your bow, for it is applauding. . . . *Moriturus salutat.*

And so he sings, and by a superhuman effort recovers the voice and spirit of younger days, arouses transports of enthusiasm heretofore unknown; the stage is strewn with flowers like a hardly closed grave. His heart throbbing with a thousand emotions, he slowly walks off the stage; the public wishes to see him once more, and loudly calls for him. What sweet and cruel anguish there is for him in that final outburst of enthusiasm! Well may he be for-

given for prolonging it a little! It is his last joy, his love, his genius, his life, shuddering as they die together. Come, then, poor great artist, brilliant meteor whose course is run, come forward and hear the supreme expression of our admiring affection and of our gratitude for the many moments of enjoyment you have given us; come and relish them, be happy and proud; you will always remember this hour, while we shall have forgotten it by tomorrow. He comes forward gasping for breath, his heart swollen with tears; loud cheers greet his appearance; the audience claps its hands, calls him by the names grandest and dearest of all to him; Cæsar crowns him. But the curtain comes down at last, like the cold, weighted knife of the guillotine; a chasm yawns between the conqueror and his triumphal chariot, a chasm not to be bridged, a chasm hewed by the years. All is over! The god is no more!

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Dark night

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Eternal night

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"We must admit that this portrait of the god-singer is not a flattering one, but marvellously like!" exclaims Corsino. "Is the book signed?"

"No."

"The author can be no other than a musician; he is bitter, but truthful, and it is easy to see that he keeps his anger within bounds."

"Let us keep our promise now. Young Kleiner has done himself credit; he must be hoarse."

"Yes; moreover, I am thirsty and stone-cold."

"Carlo!"

"Sir."

"Go and get a hot milk-chocolate for Mr. Kleiner."

"At once, sir." (The orchestra-boy disappears.)

Dimsky speaks: "We must be fair to the instrumentalists; bar-

ring a few exceptions which come to my mind, they are far more loyal than the singers, far more respectful to the masters, better up in their work, and consequently far nearer the truth. What would be said if in a Beethoven quartet the first violin took it into his head to break his phrases as a singer does, to change their rhythmic build and their accentuation? It would be rightly said that the quartet was outrageous and absurd.

Nevertheless the part of first violin is sometimes taken by virtuosi of immense reputation and talent, who must believe themselves to be, in music, supremely intelligent, and who are indeed much more so than all the gods of song; and it is precisely for this reason that they do not indulge in any such irregularities."

THE ORCHESTRA-BOY (*returning*): "Too late, gentlemen, there is no milk-chocolate left!" (*All laugh.*)

KLEINER (*breaking his 'cello bow on his music-stand*): "Really, this is a special worry predestined to my family! And here I have gone and broken an excellent bow! Well, I'll have to drink water. . . . Think no more about it!"

The curtain falls.

The tenor is not recalled; his last note is barely applauded. A scene of fury and despair at the back of the stage. The demigod tears his hair. As they pass him, the musicians shrug their shoulders.

SEVENTH EVENING

Historical and Philosophical Study,

De viris illustribus urbis Romæ.—A Roman Woman.—

Vocabulary of the Roman language



VERY insipid modern Italian opera is being performed.

A frequenter of the orchestra stalls who on previous evenings has seemed to take great interest in the readings and narratives of the musicians bends over the rail of the orchestra and, addressing me, inquires: "You live in Paris ordinarily, do you not, sir?"

"I do; I even live there extraordinarily, and often longer than I care to."

"That being so, you are no doubt familiar with the strange language spoken there, of which your newspapers also make use at times. Pray explain to me what they mean, when chronicling certain incidents, which, it would seem, occur rather frequently in dramatic performances, by speaking of *Romans*."

"Yes," say several musicians speaking simultaneously, "what is meant in France by that word?"

"You are asking me, gentlemen, no less than to hold a class of Roman history."

"And why not?"

"I fear that I am not gifted with a talent for brevity."

"That doesn't matter! The opera is in four acts, and we are yours till eleven o'clock."

"Well, then, in order to put you in touch at once with the great men of this story of mine, I shall not begin as far back as the sons of Mars, nor with Numa Pompilius; I am going to ride roughshod over kings, consuls, and dictators; and yet I must entitle the first chapter of my history:

DE VIRIS ILLUSTRIBUS URBIS ROMÆ

NERO (you see that I come without transition to the days of the emperors)—Nero having instituted a body of men whose business

was to applaud him when he sang in public, the name *Romans* is nowadays bestowed in France upon professional applauders, commonly known as *claqueurs*, upon throwers of bouquets, and upon all who undertake to ensure success and enthusiasm in general. They are of several kinds:

The mother who so brazenly calls everybody's attention to the wit and beauty of her daughter, whose beauty is only middling, and who is something of a fool; the same mother, who, in spite of her tender affection for the girl, will nevertheless be resigned to a cruel separation at the earliest possible moment, by throwing her into the arms of a husband, is a Roman.

The author who, foreseeing the time when he may need during the coming year the praises of a critic whom he loathes, frantically sings in every direction the praises of this very critic, is a Roman.

The critic so little a Spartan that he allows himself to be thus grossly trapped, in his turn becomes a Roman.

The husband of the professional singer who. . . . You understand. But the common herd of Romans, the mob—in a word, the Roman people—are specially composed of the class of men Nero was the first to enrol. They go to the theatre, even to other places, to applaud, under the leadership of a chief and his lieutenants, artists and works he has bound himself to support.

Many are the ways of applauding.

The first, as you all know, consists in creating as much noise as possible by clapping the hands. There are in this first method many varieties and subtle differences: the extremity of the right hand striking in the hollow of the left produces a sharp and resonant sound, which the greater number of artists prefer; contrariwise, both hands struck against each other result in a dull and commonplace sound; only pupil-*claqueurs* of the first year or barbers' assistants applaud like that.

The gloved *claqueur*, dressed as a dandy, stretches his arms out affectedly over the ledge of his box, applauding slowly and almost noiselessly, and for the eyes only; he thus says to the whole house: "Look! I condescend to applaud."

The *claqueur* who is carried away (there really are some of this kind) applauds quickly, strongly, and for a long time; during his applause he looks right and left; then, these demonstrations failing to satisfy him, he stamps, he shouts: "Bravô! Bravô!" (notice

the circumflex accent on the \acute{o}) or "Brava!" (This man is the scholar of the gang; he has kept company with Italians, and can distinguish the two genders); he multiplies his clamour in proportion as the cloud of dust arising from his stamping increases in density.

The *claqueur* disguised as an old gentleman living on his means or a retired colonel, gently strikes the floor with the end of his stick, with an air of paternal moderation.

The violin-*claqueur* (for we have many artists in the orchestras of Paris who, in order to pay court either to the director of the theatre, to their conductor, or to a popular and powerful *cantatrice*, temporarily enlist in the Roman army)—the violinist-*claqueur*, I say, strikes the body of his violin with the back of his bow. This form of applause, rarer than the others, has therefore more distinction. Unfortunately, cruel disillusion has taught the gods and goddesses that it is no easy matter for them to discover whether the applause of the violinists is ironical or genuine. Hence the anxious smile of the deities when homage of this kind is rendered to them.

The kettledrummer applauds by striking his drums; this does not happen once in fifteen years.

The Roman dames occasionally applaud with their gloved hands, but their influence produces its full effect only when they throw their bouquet at the feet of the artist they patronize. As this species of applause is rather costly, it is generally the nearest relation, the artist's bosom friend, or the artist herself, who pays expenses. So much is given to the fair flower-throwers for the blooms, and so much for their enthusiasm; further, a nimble man or boy has to be paid to run to the back entrance of the theatre after the first shower of flowers, recover them, and return them to the Roman dames in the stage-boxes; the ladies then make use of them a second and often a third time.

Then there is the sensitive Roman woman who weeps, goes into hysterics, faints. A rare species, seldom found, and very closely allied to the giraffe family.

But in order to confine ourselves to the study of the Roman people properly so-called, I must tell you how and on what terms they work.

Given a man who, either under the impulse of an irresistible natural vocation, or owing to long and serious studies, has suc-

ceeded in acquiring real talent as a Roman, he calls on a theatrical director, to whom he says in so many words: "Sir, you are at the head of a dramatic concern of which I know both the weak and the strong side; you have so far no manager of *successes*; let me be the man; I offer you twenty thousand francs cash down and an annuity of ten thousand."—"I demand thirty thousand in cash," the director generally replies.—"Ten thousand francs shall not stand in the way of our striking a bargain; you shall have them by tomorrow."—"Done; but I insist on a hundred men for ordinary performances, and at least five hundred for all first nights and important débuts."—"You shall have them, and more still."—"What!" exclaims a musician, interrupting, "it is the director who is paid? . . . I had always believed it to be the other way round!"—"Yes, sir, such posts are purchased, like the seat of a stock-broker, or a notary's or solicitor's practice.")

Armed with his *commission*, the chief of the Bureau of Successes, the Emperor of the Romans, easily recruits his army among hairdressers' assistants, commercial travellers, cab-drivers afoot,¹ poor students, choristers who want to be placed on the waiting-list, etc., etc., who all have the theatre craze. He selects a place of meeting for them, generally a low café or a beershop near the centre of their operations. There he counts them and gives them his instructions, with pit or third-gallery tickets, for which these poor wretches pay thirty or forty sous, or less, according to the standing of the theatre they are to "work." The lieutenants alone get free passes. On field-days they are remunerated by their chief. It even happens, when it is a matter of *puffing thoroughly* a new work that has cost the theatre management a large sum, that not only is the chief unable to find sufficient paying Romans, but he lacks faithful soldiers prepared to give battle for the love of art. Then he is compelled to pay the additional soldiers for his army, give each soldier as much as three francs, and throw in a glass of brandy.

But in this case not only does the Emperor himself receive *parterre* tickets, but bank-notes drop into his pocket in quantities

¹ When a cab-driver has incurred the displeasure of the Prefect of Police, the latter suspends his licence for two or three weeks, during which the poor fellow, who is not earning anything, certainly does not ride in his vehicle. He goes afoot, and then he frequently enters the ranks of the infantry. (Note by Berlioz.)

hardly to be credited. One of the artists appearing in the new piece wishes to be *supported* exceptionally; he offers a few tickets to the Emperor, who, assuming his most freezing look, takes from his pocket a handful of these pasteboards, and retorts: "You see I don't lack them. What I require for this evening is men, and to get them I have to pay them." The artist takes the hint, and slips into the Cæsar's hand a "rag" of five hundred francs. The artist who ranks above the one who has just let himself be bled soon hears of this generosity; and the dread of not being *taken care of* in proportion to his merit, because of the extraordinary *care* to be lavished upon his inferior, induces him to offer the undertaker of successes a real thousand-franc note, nay, sometimes more. And so on from the top to the bottom of the whole dramatic personnel. You will now understand why and how the theatrical director is paid by the chief of the *claque*; and how easy it is for the latter to acquire wealth.

The first great Roman I became acquainted with at the Paris Opéra was named Augustus—a fortunate name for a Cæsar. I have met with few majesties more imposing than his. He was reserved and dignified, sparing of his words, entirely given up to his meditations, his combinations, his high strategic calculations. He was nevertheless a very good sort of fellow, and as I was at the time a frequenter of the parterre, I was frequently indebted to him for a kindness. Moreover, the fervour I showed in spontaneously applauding Gluck and Spontini, Madame Branchu and Dérivis, had won me his particular esteem. Having just then produced in the church of Saint-Roch my first work (a *Messe solennelle*), and the devout old women, the one who let out chairs, the dispenser of holy water, the beadles, and all the idlers of the neighbourhood having shown themselves well pleased with it, I was artless enough to believe in a success. But alas, it was at best but a quarter success; it did not take long for me to discover that. Meeting me a couple of days after the performance, the Emperor Augustus said to me: "So you made your *début* at Saint-Roch the day before yesterday? Why the devil did you not give me notice of it? We should have been there, the whole lot of us!"

"What! you are as fond as that of religious music?"

"Oh dear, no, what an idea! But we would have *warmed you up well*."

"What next, I wonder? One does not applaud in churches."

"Of course one does not applaud; no indeed; but one coughs, blows one's nose, shifts the chairs, shuffles one's feet, and ejaculates 'hum, hum'; one looks up to heaven; the *whole bag of tricks*, what! We should have *brought the thing up to boiling-point* in fine style, and made it a *grand success*, just as in the case of a fashionable preacher."

A couple of years later I once more omitted to notify him of my first concert at the Conservatoire. All the same, Augustus went to it with two of his A.D.C.'s; and in the evening, when I took my customary seat at the Opéra, he gave me his powerful hand and said to me in a paternal and convinced tone (in French, of course): "*Tu Marcellus eris!*" (Here Bacon nudges his neighbour, and asks him in a whisper the meaning of these three words. "I don't know," answers the latter. "They are to be found in Virgil," volunteers Corsino, who has overheard both the question and the answer. "It means: 'Thou shalt be Marcellus!'"—"But, then, what is it to be Marcellus?"—"Not to be a fool; shut up.")

Nevertheless the *Masters of Claque* do not harbour much love, generally speaking, for perfervid amateurs of my sort; they profess a distrust amounting to antipathy for those adventurers, *condottieri*, forlorn hopes of enthusiasm, who rush in like fools to applaud in their ranks *without having attended rehearsals*. On the occasion of a certain first performance, when it was anticipated that there was going to be—to employ the Roman language—a *tough pull*—that is, a strenuous job for the soldiers of Augustus to win the public over—I had by chance sat down on a parterre bench which the Emperor had marked on his map of operations as being reserved exclusively for himself. I had been there for a good half-hour, a target for the hostile glances of my neighbours, who seemed to be asking themselves how they were going to get rid of me, and I was asking myself with a certain amount of bewilderment, in spite of the purity of my conscience, what I could have done to those officers, when the Emperor Augustus, darting at me surrounded by his staff, made matters clear by saying with a certain amount of sharpness, yet not angrily (I have already said I was a protégé of his): "My good sir, I am sorry to have to disturb you, but you cannot remain where you are."

"Why not?"

"I tell you it's impossible; you are in the very centre of my front line, and you are *intersecting* me."

You may be sure that I hastened to leave the field free to this great tactician.

Any other outsider, unable to recognize the necessities of the situation, would have resisted the Emperor, thus compromising the success of his plans. Hence the opinion, fully justified by a long series of scholarly observations, an opinion openly professed by Augustus and his whole army: *The public is absolutely of no use in a theatre; it is not only useless, but it spoils everything. As long as there is a public at the Opéra, the Opéra will not get along.* The directors of the day called him crazy when he uttered those bold words. Great Augustus! He did not even suspect that a few years after his death striking justice would be rendered to his doctrines! It is the fate of all men of genius to be misunderstood by their contemporaries and to be exploited later by their successors.

No, never did a more intelligent or bolder dispenser of glory reign absolute under any theatre's chandelier.

Compared to Augustus, the one who reigns at the Opéra at present is merely a Vespasian, a Claudius. His name is David; so who could give him the title of emperor? Nobody would dare. At most do his flatterers venture to style him king, and that merely because of his name.

The illustrious and skilled chief of the Romans at the Opéra-Comique bears the name of Albert; but, as with his former namesake, he is spoken of as Albert the Great.

He was the first of all to put into practice the daring theory of Augustus, by pitilessly excluding the public from first performances. On these occasions at the present time, if one excepts the critics, who, for the greater part, likewise belong in some way or other to the *viris illustribus urbis Romæ*, the house is filled from floor to ceiling with *claqueurs* only.

It is to Albert the Great that we owe the touching custom of recalling all the actors at the end of every new work. King David promptly followed his lead in this; and, emboldened by the success of this first improvement, he added that of calling the tenor before the curtain as often as three times in the course of the evening. A god who, in a gala performance, should be recalled, like an ordinary mortal, only once at the end of the work would be a

dead failure. It therefore follows that if, in spite of all his efforts, David has only succeeded in securing so meagre a result for a generous tenor, his rivals of the Théâtre-Français and the Opéra-Comique sneer at him the next day, commenting: "Yesterday David *applauded uselessly.*" I will give by and by the explanation of these Roman terms. Unfortunately Albert the Great, no doubt weary of reigning, has seen fit to lay down his sceptre. When handing it over to his obscure successor he would willingly have said, like Scylla in M. de Jouy's tragedy: "*J'ai gouverné sans peur et j'abdique sans crainte,*" had the line been a better one. But Albert is a man of parts, he detests mediocre literature; this, strictly speaking, might explain his eagerness to leave the Opéra-Comique.

Another great man, whom I did not know, but who enjoys immense celebrity in Paris, ruled, and I believe still rules, at the Gymnase-Dramatique. His name is Sauton. He has made his art progress on broad and new lines by establishing friendly relations between the Romans and the authors; a system which David, the plagiarist, has hastened to adopt. Nowadays one sees a *claque*-leader sitting familiarly at the table not only of Melpomene, Thalia, or Terpsichore, but even of Apollo and Orpheus. For both does he go bail, helps them with his purse in their secret embarrassments, patronizes them, and loves them with all his heart.

The following admirable remark is said to have been addressed by the Emperor Sauton to one of our wittiest writers, the least good at hoarding up money:

At the close of a hearty luncheon at which cordials had not been spared, Sauton, flushed with excitement, and twisting his napkin, finally found sufficient courage to say to his host, without undue stammering: "My dear D., I have a request to make of you. . . ." —"What is it? Speak out!"—"Allow me to—to thee-and-thou you . . . let us thee-and-thou each other!"—"Willingly, Sauton; wilt thou lend me a thousand crowns?"—"Oh, my dear friend, thou makest me only too happy!" And, pulling out his pocketbook: "There you are!"

I am unable, gentlemen, to draw for you the portraits of all the illustrious men of the city of Rome, since I lack both the time and the biographical knowledge. I will merely add, regarding the three heroes about whom I have discoursed to you, that Augustus, Albert, and Sauton although rivals, were always on friendly terms.

They did not, during their triumvirate, copy the wars and treacheries that in history disgraced that of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus. Far from it, for whenever the Opéra gave one of those terrible performances at which a brilliant, formidable, and epic victory absolutely needs to be won, one that Pindar and Homer would be powerless to sing, Augustus, disdaining inexperienced recruits, would appeal to his triumvirs. Overjoyed at joining forces with so great a man, they consented to acknowledge him as their chief; Albert brought him his indomitable phalanx and Sauton his light infantry, all animated with that irresistible spirit which nothing can withstand, and which performs wonders. The three crack corps were fused into one army in the parterre of the Opéra on the day preceding the performance. Augustus, plan of campaign, libretto, and notes in hand, would put his troops through a strenuous rehearsal, occasionally adopting the suggestions of Antony and Lepidus, who had very few to make to him, so quick and sure was the eye of Augustus in seizing the main point, so great his discernment in guessing the schemes of the enemy, his genius for thwarting them, and his sense not to attempt the impossible. And what triumphs on the following day, what cheers, what heaps of rich spoils, not offered to Jupiter Stator, but coming from him and from twenty other gods!

Such are the priceless services rendered to both art and artists by the Roman nation.

Will you believe, gentlemen, that there is some talk of driving it out of the Opéra? Several newspapers announce this reform, which we cannot believe will take place, even should we witness it. The *claque* has indeed become a need of the day; under every form, every disguise, and every pretext it has forced its way in everywhere. It reigns and governs in the theatre, at concerts, in the National Assembly, clubs, churches, industrial companies, the press, and even the drawing-room. No sooner are twenty people gathered together to pronounce judgment on the sayings or doings or ideas of any individual than you may rest assured that at least one-fourth of this Areopagus is put along with the other three-fourths for the purpose of *firing* them should they be inflammable, or, if not, to display its own ardour. In the latter case, a very common one, this isolated enthusiasm, proceeding from nothing but a foregone conclusion, is still sufficient to flatter the self-esteem of

most persons. Some of them even manage to deceive themselves as to the real value of suffrages obtained in such fashion; others are not so easily fooled, but yearn for them none the less. The former have reached such a pitch that were they not to have at their beck and call living creatures to applaud them, they would be contented with the applause of a troupe of lay figures, or even with those of a mechanical *claque*, the handle of which they would be prepared to turn themselves.

The *claqueurs* of our theatres have become expert practitioners; their profession has risen to be an art. People have often admired, but never enough in my opinion, the marvellous talent with which Augustus *directed* the great works of the modern repertory, and the excellence of the advice he would give to authors on many occasions. Concealed in a box on the ground-floor, he attended all the artists' rehearsals previous to rehearsing his own army. Then, when the *maestro* came and said to him: "*Here* you will give three rounds of applause; *there* you will shout encore," he would answer with imperturbable assurance, as the case might be: "Sir, *it is dangerous*," or "It shall be *done*," or "I must think the matter over, my mind is not yet made up on the point. Have a few *amateurs* for the attack, and I'll follow their lead if it *catches on*." It would even happen to Augustus to resist boldly some author who would have liked to draw *dangerous* applause from him, and to reply to him: "I cannot do it, sir. You would be compromising me in the eyes of the public, of the artists, and of my fellow *claqueurs*, who know full well that *it would not be right to do it*. I have my reputation to maintain; I too have some self-respect. Your work is very difficult to *direct*, and I'll do my best for you; but I cannot allow *myself* to be hissed."

Along with the professional *claqueurs*, educated, sagacious, prudent, inspired—in a word, artists—we have the occasional *claqueurs* who applaud out of friendship and personal interest; these will never be banished from the Opéra. They comprise: naïve friends who sincerely admire everything they hear on the stage, even *before the candles have been lit* (it may be said in all truth that this kind of friends is daily becoming rare; those, contrariwise, who disparage everything, both before and after, are multiplying enormously); the relations, those *claqueurs supplied by nature*; publishers—fierce *claqueurs*—and especially lovers and

husbands. That is why women, in addition to the multitude of other advantages they possess over men, have one more chance of success than the latter. In a theatre or concert hall a woman can hardly applaud her husband or her lover to any useful purpose; moreover, she has always something else to do; whereas the latter, provided they possess the slightest natural disposition for, or elementary notions of the art, can by means of a skilful and sudden vigorous attack, and in less than three minutes at that, bring about a *renewal success*—in other words, a serious success that will compel a manager to renew an engagement. For this kind of operation husbands are of even greater value than lovers. The latter ordinarily dread ridicule; secretly they also fear that a too pronounced success will increase the number of their rivals; besides, they are not interested financially in the triumphs of their mistress; but the husband, who holds the purse-strings, who knows the value of a bouquet tossed at the right moment, of a timely repetition of a round of applause, of an emotion judiciously communicated, of a recall vigorously carried off, alone dares take advantage of the aptitudes he possesses. He has the gifts of ventriloquism and ubiquity. One moment he is applauding from the balcony, and shouting: "*Brava!*" in the chest-notes of a tenor; thence he makes one jump to the corridor of the first boxes and, thrusting his head through the peep-hole, ejaculates in a *basso profondo* voice an "Admirable!" as he passes by, to fly panting to the third tier, where he makes the house ring with his exclamations of "Delightful! Exquisite! Ye gods, what a talent! It hurts!" in a soprano voice, in feminine tones choked with emotion. There you have the model husband, a hard-working and intelligent paterfamilias. As to the husband who is a man of taste, who is undemonstrative, who remains quietly in his seat during an entire act, who does not even dare applaud the finest efforts of his better half, it may be said of him without fear of being mistaken: "As a husband he is lost, unless his wife is an angel of fidelity."

Was not a husband the inventor of the *hissing success*; the enthusiastic hiss, the high-pressure hiss which is employed in the following manner? If the public, sated with the talent of a woman whom it has heard daily, seems to lapse into apathetic indifference, a loyal and little-known friend is given a seat in order to stir up the audience. Just as the *diva* gives unmistakable proof

of her talent, and the artist-*claqueurs* are working together at their best in the centre of the floor, a strident and insulting noise emanates from some dark corner. The whole house rises in a fit of indignation, and a furious storm of avenging plaudits breaks loose. Cries of "What an infamous thing!" are heard from every part of the house. "What an ignoble cabal! *Brava, bravissima!* Charming! Splendid!" etc., etc. But so audacious a trick requires very delicate handling; besides, there are very few women prepared to submit to the fictitious affront of a hiss, however productive it may prove afterwards.

Such is the inexplicable impression made on all artists by approving or disapproving noises, even when these noises express neither blame nor admiration. Habit, imagination, and a little weak-mindedness make them feel joy or pain, according to the manner in which the air is made to vibrate in a theatre one way or the other. The physical phenomenon suffices, independently of all idea of glory or opprobrium. I am sure there are actors who are childish enough, when travelling by rail, to suffer from the locomotive whistle.

The art of the *claque* reacts even on that of musical composition. It is the numerous varieties of Italian *claqueurs*, either amateurs or artists, who have induced composers to end their pieces with the redundant, trivial, ridiculous, and ever-identical period called *cabaletta*—little cabal—that calls forth applause. The *cabaletta* ceasing to satisfy them, they have introduced the big drum into the orchestra, a big cabal destructive of both music and singers at present. Tired at last of the big drum, and unable to *carry success by storm* with the ancient means, they have finally required the poor *maestri* to give them duos, trios, and choruses in unison. In some passages the composers have even been compelled to write for voices and orchestra in unison, thus producing an ensemble number in *one* part alone, in which an enormous bulk of tone seems preferable to all harmony, to all instrumentation, to all musical conception, indeed, in order to *rush* the public and inspire it with the belief that it is electrified.

Analogous examples are plentiful in regard to the manufacture of literary works.

As to dancers, it is a very simple matter; it is settled thus with the impresario: "You will give me so many thousand francs a

month, so many *billets de service*² a performance, and the *claque* will give me an *entrance*, an *exit*, and two rounds of applause at each of my echoes.”³

By means of the *claque*, directors make or unmake at will what are still called successes. A word from the chief of the parterre is sufficient for them to destroy an artist whose talent is not remarkable. I recollect having heard Augustus say one evening at the Opéra, as he was running through the ranks of his army previous to the rise of the curtain: “Not a hand for M. Dérivis! Not one!” The order went round, and of course M. Dérivis did not obtain a single plaudit. The director who wishes to get rid of an individual for some reason or other has recourse to this ingenious means, and after two or three performances in which *there has not been anything* for Mr.— or for Madame— he says to the artist: “You must see that it is impossible for me to retain your services; your talent is not appreciated by the public.” On the other hand it sometimes happens that these tactics fail with a virtuoso of the first order. “Nothing for him!” has been decreed in the official circle. But the public, amazed in the first instance at the silence of the Romans, and soon guessing what is on the carpet, goes into action unofficially, and with all the more warmth because there is a hostile cabal to thwart. The artist then obtains an exceptional success, a *circular* success, the centre of the parterre not taking any part in it. But I dare not assert whether he is prouder of this spontaneous enthusiasm of the public than irritated at the inaction of the *claque*.

To dream of abruptly destroying such an institution in the greatest of our theatres seems to me as impossible and as insane as to attempt to blot a religion out of existence between eve and dawn.

Can one imagine the disorder at the Opéra; the discouragement, melancholy, and low spirits to which all its dancing, singing, walking, rhyming, painting, and composing people would succumb; the disgust with life that would take possession of gods and demigods when a *cabaletta* sung or danced in less than faultless style was

² *Billets de service* are the free passes to which a performer is entitled on days when he is playing. (Berlioz's note.)

³ *Echoes* are the *solis* of a dancer in the course of a choreographic ensemble. (Berlioz's note.)

succeeded by a frightful silence? Has one thought of the fury of the mediocrities on seeing real talents occasionally applauded, while they themselves, who formerly were always applauded, get not a single hand? It would be tantamount to admitting the principle of inequality and demonstrating it publicly, and we are under a republic; the word "Equality" is inscribed on the pediment of the Opéra! Furthermore, who would there be to recall the leading character after the third and fifth acts? Who would there be to shout: "The Company!" at the close of the performance? Who would laugh when a character committed some blunder? Who would drown with kindly applause the false note of a bass or a tenor, thus preventing the public from hearing it? The thought of it is enough to make one shudder. Further, the *manœuvres* of the *claque* form part of the interest of the show; it is a joy to see it in full cry. This is so true that were the *claqueurs* banished from certain performances, there would not be a soul in the house.

No, the suppression of the Romans in France is happily an insane dream. Heaven and earth shall pass, but Rome is immortal, and the *claque* shall not.

Listen! . . . Here is our prima donna, who takes it into her head to sing soulfully, and with tasteful simplicity, the only melody of distinction in this poor opera. You will see that she will not get a hand. . . . Aha, I was mistaken; yes, they applaud, but in what a fashion! How badly it is done, what an abortive round of applause, badly begun and badly renewed! The public is brimming with goodwill, but has neither the necessary knowledge nor the "all together"; consequently its effort falls flat. If Augustus had had to *nurse* that woman, he would have carried the house at the first onset, and you, my friends, who do not dream of applauding, you would have participated in his enthusiasm willy-nilly.

Gentlemen, I have so far not given you a full-length portrait of the Roman female. Let me take advantage of our opera's last act, which is just about to begin. Let us enjoy a short *entr'acte*; I feel exhausted.

(The musicians move aside a little, and exchange ideas in a low voice while the curtain is down. But following the three raps of the conductor's baton on his music-stand, indicating the resump-

tion of the performance, my audience returns and clusters in an attitude of attention about me.)

MADAME ROSENHAIN

Another Fragment of Roman History

SOME years ago a five-act opera was *ordered* by M. Duponchel of a French composer unknown to you. While its final rehearsals were taking place, I was thinking by my fireside of the pangs of anguish that the unfortunate author of that opera was feeling. I mused over the ever-recurring torments of all kinds from which none escape in Paris in these circumstances, neither the great, the small, the patient, the irritable, the lowly, the exalted, the German, the Frenchman, nor even the Italian. I pictured to myself the excruciating slowness of the studies, during which one and all waste their time on tomfooleries, though every hour lost may mean the wreck of the work; the jokes of the tenor and of the prima donna, over which the saddened author feels himself compelled to shriek with laughter, when the iron of death has entered his soul—ridiculous quips, to which he ripostes with the dullest witticisms he can lay his hands on, the better to set off those of his singers and make them look like witty sallies. I could hear the director's voice heaping blame upon him, treating him scornfully, reminding him of the extreme honour done to his work in giving so much time to it, threatening to throw the whole thing overboard if everything was not ready on the day appointed; I could see the poor slave shiver and flush at the eccentric views of his master (the director) on music and musicians, at his extraordinary theories concerning melody, rhythm, instrumentation, style, in the exposition of which theories our beloved director treats great masters as blockheads, and blockheads as great masters, and takes the Piræus to be a man! The next thing was the announcement that the mezzo-soprano had left, and that the bass was ill; it was proposed to fill the latter's place with a *débutant*, and have the leading role rehearsed by a member of the chorus. The composer felt he was being slaughtered, but was careful not to utter any complaint. Oh, how pleasant it is to dream of hail, rain, glacial winds, dark squalls, leafless forests crying out under the north wind's icy blasts, quagmires, ditches

covered with a treacherous crust, the growing obsession of fatigue, the gnawings of hunger, the terrors of solitude and of the night, when safe in shelter (be it as small as that of the hare of the fable), in the quietude of lukewarm inaction; to feel one's rest *increased twofold by the distant noises of the tempest*, and to repeat, while bristling one's beard, and shutting one's eyes sanctimoniously, like a parson's cat, the prayer of the German poet, Henri Heine, a prayer so seldom heard: "O God, Thou knowest it, I possess a very good heart, my sensitiveness is lively and deep, I am full of commiseration and sympathy for the sufferings of others, so pray grant my neighbour my ills to bear; I will devote so much care to him, show him such delicate consideration; my compassion will be so active, so ingenious, that he will bless your right hand, Lord God, for receiving such solace, such sweet consolation. But to crush me with the weight of my own pains, to make me suffer personally, oh, that would be frightful! Take away from my lips this cup of bitterness, merciful God!"

I was thus immersed in pious meditation when I heard a slight knock at the door of my oratory. My valet being on a mission to a foreign court, I asked myself whether I was visible, and on my affirmative answer, I showed the caller in. A well-dressed and, upon my word, none too young lady made her appearance; she was in the full bloom of her forty-fifth year. It dawned upon me at once that I had to deal with an artist; there are infallible signs for recognizing these unfortunate victims of inspiration.

"Sir," she said to me, "you recently conducted an important concert at Versailles, and I had hoped, up to the very last day, to have a part in it . . . but it is no use crying over spilt milk."

"Madam, the program was drawn up by the committee of the Society of Musicians; I am not responsible for it. Moreover, Madame Dorus-Gras and Madame Widemann—"

"Oh, those two ladies may not have said anything, but it is none the less a fact that they will have been greatly displeased."

"Why so, pray?"

"Because I was not engaged."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it, but do not let us recriminate over the matter. I came to ask you, sir, to be kind enough to recommend me to Messrs. Roqueplan and Duponchel; I am desirous of belonging

to the Opéra. I was attached to the Théâtre-Italien up to last season, and I was certainly thoroughly satisfied with M. Vatel's kindly treatment of me; but ever since the February Revolution . . . you must see that such a theatre cannot suit me."

"Madame has no doubt excellent reasons for showing herself very particular in the choice of her colleagues; if I might venture an opinion—"

"It would not be of any use, sir, for my mind is irrevocably made up; it is impossible for me to remain at the Théâtre-Italien, on any terms whatever. Everything connected with it is antipathetic to me, the artists, the public that goes to it, the public that keeps away from it; and although the present condition of the Opéra is hardly a brilliant one, still, as my son and two daughters were engaged last year by the new management, on, I may say, most advantageous terms, it would give me great pleasure to be engaged, and I shall not quarrel about terms."

"You forget, I see, that the directors of the Opéra, possessing, as they do, an extremely superficial acquaintance with music and the vaguest sense of it, have as a natural consequence very fixed ideas concerning our art, and so they do not set much store on recommendations, especially mine. Nevertheless, be good enough to tell me what your voice is."

"I am not a singer."

"Ah, as it is a question of dancing, my influence will be less."

"I am not a dancer."

"Then it is merely the walking-on ladies that you seek to join?"

"I do not walk on, sir, you are singularly mistaken. (*Smiling somewhat ironically*) I am Madame Rosenhain."

"Related to the pianist?"

"No, but Mesdames Persiani, Grisi, Alboni, and Messieurs Mario and Tamburini must have spoken to you about me, for I have had a great deal to do with their triumphs. For a short time I had thought of going and giving lessons in London, where, it is said, they are somewhat behind the times; as I said before, my children being at the Opéra . . . and then, the grandeur of the theatre open to my ambition. . . ."

"Pray excuse my lack of discernment, madam, and kindly reveal to me what your talent actually is."

"I am, sir, an artist who was the cause of M. Vatel's making more money than Rubini himself, and I flatter myself that I shall be the cause of an increase in the Opéra's receipts to some extent, should my two daughters, who have already distinguished themselves, wisely avail themselves of the example I have set them. I am, sir, a *thrower of flowers*."

"Now I understand. You are in the Enthusiasm Department, eh?"

"Precisely. This branch of musical art is only just beginning to bloom. Formerly it was the great society ladies who attended to the matter, gratuitously, or very nearly so. You remember the concerts of M. Liszt, and the débuts of M. Duprez? What volleys of bouquets! What applause! Young girls and even married women waxed shamelessly enthusiastic; several of them compromised themselves seriously more than once. Such uproar, such disorder, how many beautiful flowers wasted! It made one feel sorry. Nowadays, the public no longer having anything to do with it, thank God and the artists, we have regulated ovations in accordance with my system, and things are quite different. Under the Opéra's latest management our art nearly became a lost one, or at the very least it retrograded. The Enthusiasm Department was entrusted to four inexperienced young ballet-girls, and, what is worse, they were personally known to all the subscribers; these children, novices as people are at their age, always occupied the same seats in the house, and everlastingly threw the same bouquets to the same singers at the very same moment; in the end the eloquence of their flowers became a subject of derision. My daughters, having learnt their lesson from me, have reformed all that, and I think that the management is now fully satisfied."

"Is your son likewise in the flowers?"

"Oh, as regards my son, he has another way of stimulating enthusiasm; he has a magnificent voice."

"How, then, is it that his name is still unknown to me?"

"He does not appear on the bills."

"And yet he sings, does he not?"

"No, sir, he shouts."

"That is what I meant."

"Yes, he shouts, and his voice has often been sufficient in critical

moments to carry away the most refractory masses; my son, sir, is for the *rappel* (recall)."⁴

"Can it be that you are compatriots of O'Connell?"

"I do not know an actor of that name. My son goes in for the recall of leading characters when the public remains cold and gives nobody a call. You can see that his is no sinecure and that he fully earns his money. He was fortunate enough, when making his début at the Théâtre-Français, to find there a tragic actress whose name begins with an excellent syllable, the syllable *Ra*! No one but the gods know how much can be done with that *Ra*! I should have been full of anxiety as to his success at the Opéra, at the time of the retirement of the famous prima donna whose solitary *O* resounded so well, in spite of the five Teutonic consonants hemming it in, had there not arisen another prima donna, whose syllable, a still more favourable one, the syllable *Ma*, placed my son on the pinnacle then and there. And so my boy, who is somewhat witty, argues that by slurring, the syllable becomes an imaginary one. Now you know it all."

"Completely, and therefore I may say to you that your talent is in itself the best of introductions; that the management of the Opéra will beyond doubt appreciate it; you should go and offer your services as quickly as possible, for the Opéra is seeking for talent, and has for more than a week now been engineering a huge outburst of enthusiasm over a third act in which it is deeply interested."

"My best thanks to you, sir. I am off to the Opéra as fast as I can get there."

Thereupon the lady vanished. I have not heard from her from that day to this, but I have acquired proof of the entire success of her application, and the certitude that she has entered into an excellent contract with the Opéra management. At the first performance of the new work, the one ordered by M. Duponchel, a veritable shower of flowers dropped on the stage at the close of the third act, and it could easily be seen that it came from a practised hand. Unfortunately this courteous ovation did not prevent the play and the music from doing the same."

⁴ *Rappel* means both "recall" and "repeal." Hence the author's pun. (Translator's note.)

"From doing—what?" asked Bacon, that naïve querist.

"From being dropped, you idiot," retorted Corsino brutally. "Confound you, your wits are even more obtuse than usual this evening. To bed with you, Basile."⁵

Gentlemen, it remains for me to give you the meaning of the terms used most frequently in the Roman language, terms which Parisians alone understand thoroughly.

Faire four (to fail, a "frost") signifies not to produce any effect, and to fall flat before the indifference of the public.

Chaufer un four (to bolster up a failure) is to applaud in vain an artist whose talent is incapable of moving the public; this expression is the counterpart of the proverb: *A sword-thrust in the water* (labour lost).⁶

Avoir de l'agrément (to enjoy approbation) consists in being applauded by the *claque* and a portion of the public. On the day of his début in *Guillaume Tell*, Duprez received extraordinary *approbation*.

Égayer (to enliven) an individual is to hiss him. This irony is cruel, but it embodies a secret meaning, which makes it still more biting. Undoubtedly the unfortunate artist who is hissed can hardly be said to derive any great enjoyment from the fact, but his rival for the position he holds feels enlivened at hearing him hissed; many others also laugh in secret over his misfortune. Taking it all round, when one man is hissed, there is always another who is enlivened.

Tirage (pull) is used in the Roman language for difficulty,

⁵ The point of the "Basile" is that in one of the scenes of the *Barbier* the other characters all join in an attempt to get Basile out of the way, at a moment when his presence is inconvenient, by persuading him that he is ill and ought to be in bed. (E. N.)

⁶ *Faire four*. This expression goes back to the seventeenth century and seems to have been imported into France by the Italian actors who said *faire fuori* in the sense of "to put outside," to dismiss a small audience, when receipts did not cover expenses. It may be, however, that the French expression, "noir comme dans un four" (as dark as in an oven) may have contributed to determining the primitive meaning of *faire four*. Indeed, viewed from the stage, the boxes, when not brilliant with dazzling toilets, seem to be black and gaping holes; at any rate, there is a suggestion of this explanation in the following passages taken from Victor Hugo's *L'Homme qui rit*: "*Seulement le compartiment pour la noblesse restait toujours vide. Cela faisait à cet endroit, qui était le centre du balcon, un trou noir, ce qu'on appelle, en métaphore d'argot, 'un four.'*" *Faire four* is applied to other than theatrical failures, to a book, to an undertaking, etc. (Translator's note.)

labour, trouble. Thus the Roman says: "It's a fine work, but it will take some *pulling* to set it going"—which means that in spite of all its merit the work is boring, and that it will only be by strenuous efforts that the *claque* will obtain a semblance of success for it.

Faire une entrée (to manufacture an entrance) is to applaud an actor on his appearance, even before he has opened his mouth.

Faire une sortie (to manufacture an exit) is to pursue him with plaudits and bravos as he goes into the wings, whatever his last action, word, or exclamation may have been.

Mettre à couvert (to shelter) a singer is to applaud and cheer him vigorously at the very moment he is about to produce a false or husky note, thus covering it with the noise of the *claque*, the public being prevented from hearing it.

Avoir des égards (to have some consideration) for an artist is to deal him moderate applause, even when he has been unable to give tickets to the *claque*. It is encouraging him *d'amitié* (out of friendship, or "on tick"). These words are equivalent to *gratuitously*.

Faire mousser solidement, or *à fond* (to puff the thing thoroughly, or to the very bottom) is to applaud frantically, with hands, feet, voice, and word. During the *entr'actes* the *claqueurs* have to "crack up" the work or the artist in the passages, the foyer, the neighboring café, at the tobacco-dealer's, in fact everywhere. Their duty is to say: "Masterpiece; unique talent; dumbfounding; an exceptional voice; nothing has ever been heard like it." There is a well-known professor whom the management of the Paris Opéra always summons from another country on great occasions, in order to *puff up the big works thoroughly*, by *firing* the foyer and corridors in a masterly fashion. The talent of this Roman master is serious; his seriousness is admirable.

The ensemble of these operations is expressed by the words *soins* (attentions), *soigner* (to "nurse").

Faire empoigner (to get an individual laid hold of) is to bestow applause on a weak passage or weak artist in the wrong place, a procedure that rouses the public's anger. It occasionally happens that a mediocre singer, but one who sways the heart of the director, sings in a lamentable fashion. Seated in the centre of the parterre, looking gloomy and crushed, the Emperor bows his head, thus telling his prætorians that they must remain quiet, nor give any

sign whatever of satisfaction, in fact conform to his melancholy thoughts. But the *diva*, who has little taste for such prudent reserve, rushes full of indignation into the wings, and complains to the director of the unfitness or treachery of the leader of the *claque*. Thereupon the director commands that the Roman army shall go vigorously into action in the next act. Greatly to his regret the Cæsar is compelled to obey. The second act begins, the irritated goddess sings more out of tune than before; three hundred pairs of faithful hands applaud her all the same, while the enraged public replies to these manifestations by a symphony of hisses orchestrated in the modern style, and of the most piercing sonority. The *diva* asked for it; she is "laid hold of."

I think that the use of this expression goes back only to the reign of Charles X, at the memorable sitting of the Chamber of Deputies during which, Manuel having ventured to say that France had seen with repugnance the return of the Bourbons, a parliamentary storm was let loose, and M. de Foucault, calling his gendarmes, pointed to Manuel, saying: "*Lay hold of that man for me!*"

To designate a disastrous evocation of hisses of this sort there is also the expression: "*faire appeler Azor* (to call for Azor)," an expression derived from the habit old ladies have of whistling for their dog, which always bears the name of *Azor*.

Following upon one of those catastrophes I have seen Augustus desperate and ready to take his own life, just like Brutus at Philippi—one consideration alone checked him: he was necessary to his art and country, so he resolved to live for them.

Conduire (to conduct) a work consists in directing the operations of the Roman army during rehearsals.

Brrrrrr!! the noise coming from the lips of the Emperor when directing certain movements of his troops; it is heard by all his lieutenants; it signifies that an extraordinary rapidity is to be given to the hand-claps, which are to be accompanied by stamping. It is the order to *puff up thoroughly*.

When the Imperial head, lit up with a smile, sways from right to left and from left to right, that is a sign for moderate laughter.

Cæsar's two hands vigorously slapping each other, and uplifted for the space of a second, constitute an order for a sudden burst of laughter.

Should the two hands remain uplifted longer than usual, the laughter must be prolonged and be followed by a round of plaudits.

Hum! uttered in a particular way, provokes emotion in Cæsar's soldiers, who on hearing it must grow tender, shed a few tears, and murmur their approbation.

This is all I am able to tell you, gentlemen, about the illustrious men and women of the city of Rome. I have not lived in their company long enough to know anything more about them. Pray excuse the historian's mistakes.

The frequenter of the stalls thanks me feelingly; not a word of my narration has escaped him, and I noticed him furtively taking notes. The gas is extinguished; we leave.

As we go down the stairs, Dimsky asks me with a mysterious look on his face: "Don't you know who that inquisitive fellow is who interviewed you about the Romans?"

"I do not."

"Well, he is the director of the theatre in —; be sure he is going to derive some benefit from all he has heard tonight; he will set up in his own theatre an institution similar to the Paris one."

"That being the case, I am sorry not to have informed him of a certain important fact. The directors of the Opéra, of the Opéra-Comique, and of the Théâtre-Français in Paris have gone into partnership to found a Conservatoire of Claque, and our inquisitive friend, in order to get a practical man, a tactician, a real Cæsar, or at the very least a young Octavius as head of his institution, should engage the pupil of this Conservatoire who has just secured the first prize."

"I will write that to him; I know him."

"You will be doing the right thing, my dear Dimsky."

"Let us *nurse* our art, and watch over the welfare of the empire. Good-night!"

EIGHTH EVENING

*Romans of the New World.—Mr. Barnum.—
Jenny Lind's Trip to America*



MODERN Italian opera is being given, etc.

The frequenter of the stalls, who, according to Dimsky, is manager of the theatre at —, is not there. He must surely have left, with the intention of turning to advantage his freshly acquired knowledge of Roman history.

"With the ingenious system," said Corsino to me, "the putting into execution of which you explained to us yesterday, and the exclusion of the public from first performances, every theatrical production is bound to succeed in Paris."

"Indeed, they all do. Ancient and modern works, mediocre, detestable, even excellent plays and scores, are all equally successful nowadays. Unfortunately, as it is easy to foresee, these stubborn plaudits detract somewhat from the importance of the incessant production of our theatres. The management rakes in a bit of money and helps authors to make a living, but, indifferently flattered at succeeding where no one fails, the latter work accordingly, so that the literary and musical movement of Paris gets no forward or backward impulse from the fact that there is so large a number of *workers*. On the other hand, no real successes are possible for the singers and the actors. By dint of having *all of them* recalled, the ovation has become so trite that it has lost all its value; one may even add that it is beginning to provoke the contemptuous laughter of the public. The one-eyed men, those kings in the land of the blind, cannot reign in a country where everyone is a king. . . . When one sees the results of this continuous jet of enthusiasm, one begins to doubt the accuracy of the new proverb: "Excess in everything is a quality." It might well indeed be, on the contrary, a defect, not to say a vice of the most repellent kind. When in doubt, no longer will anyone abstain; all the better. It is the way to reach a strange result sooner or later, and the experiment is worth carrying on to the end. But, do what we may in Europe, we shall always be outstripped by the

the day you accomplish the deed now in your mind, but which is to be accomplished in the fashion I am about to describe to you. It is a question of rendering a delicate homage to *her*. The object will easily be attained if you help me. Listen to me: some of you will only have to climb to the topmost storey of the houses adjoining the concert hall and fling yourselves into the street when *she* passes, shouting: 'Long live Lind!' Others are to throw themselves, but without any disorderly display or shouts, solemnly, gracefully if possible, under the hoofs of her horses, or under the wheels of her carriage; those remaining alive will be admitted to the entertainment *free*, and will hear part of the concert.'—'They are to hear it???'—'Yes, indeed. At the end of her second cavatina they will loudly proclaim that it is no longer possible for them to endure the remainder of their prosaic existence, and thereupon they will proceed to stab themselves through the heart with the daggers I am showing you. No pistols, if you please, since these are an instrument lacking in nobility; moreover, their report might be distasteful to *her*.' The bargain was struck, and its terms would doubtless have been carried out honestly by the parties concerned had not the American police, as vexatious and unintelligent a body as is to be met with, intervened to prevent it. This proves that even among artistic nations there are always a lot of narrow-minded, cold-hearted, gross—in a word, envious—men. Thus it was that the *claque unto death* was not put into practice, and a number of poor people were denied a new means of earning their livelihood.

"That's not all. It was generally believed in New York (who indeed could doubt it?) that on the day of *her* landing a *Te deum laudamus* was to be sung in the Catholic churches. But after having conferred on the matter for a long time, the incumbents of the various parishes came to the conclusion that such a demonstration would hardly be compatible with the dignity of religion; they actually went so far as to qualify the slight change in the text as blasphemous and profane. Hence not a single *Te deum* was intoned in the churches of the Union. I give you this without comment, and in all its brutal simplicity.

"An amateur told me of yet another serious wrong perpetrated by the Public Works Department of that strange country.

whales, which for more than eight hundred leagues (some say nine hundred) had played a part in the triumph of this new Galatea, following her ship and spouting jets of scent from their blow-holes, were disporting themselves wildly outside the port, in despair because they could not accompany her ashore; seals, shedding big tears, were bellowing the most mournful lamentations. There followed a spectacle dearer still to her heart—gulls, frigate-birds, loons, wild birds, all denizens of the vast solitudes of the ocean, all more fortunate than the others in that they could circle fearlessly about the adorable creature, perch on her pure shoulders, hover over her Olympian head, bearing in their bills abnormally large pearls, which they presented to her most courteously, cooing gently the while. The guns thundered, the bells pealed *Hosanna!* to her, and at intervals magnificent claps of thunder resounded through a *cloudless* sky of radiant immensity.' All this, which is as unquestionably true as the marvellous things done in days past by Amphion and Orpheus, are doubted only by us old Europeans, effete as we are, tired of pleasure, without passion and without love for art.

"Mr. Barnum, however, considering that this spontaneous élan of the creatures of heaven, earth, and the water under the earth was not sufficient, and desirous of imparting still further energy to it by means of a little innocent charlatanry, went so far as to have recourse to a form of excitement that might, were it not for the vulgarity of the expression, be appropriately styled the *claque unto death*. This past master in the art of exciting the public resolved, when he heard of the profound misery of several New York families, to come generously to their assistance, desirous as he was of connecting with the arrival of Jenny Lind the memory of benefactions worthy of being quoted hereafter. He consequently took aside the heads of these families in distress, and said to them: 'When one has lost everything, and there is no longer any hope, life becomes a shame, and you know what remains for you to do. Well, I am offering you an opportunity of doing so in a way profitable to your wretched children and your unfortunate wives, who will be eternally grateful to you. *She* has arrived!!!'—'*She*, who???'—'Yes, *she*, her own self. I therefore guarantee your heirs two thousand dollars, to be scrupulously paid to them on

the day you accomplish the deed now in your mind, but which is to be accomplished in the fashion I am about to describe to you. It is a question of rendering a delicate homage to *her*. The object will easily be attained if you help me. Listen to me: some of you will only have to climb to the topmost storey of the houses adjoining the concert hall and fling yourselves into the street when *she* passes, shouting: 'Long live Lind!' Others are to throw themselves, but without any disorderly display or shouts, solemnly, gracefully if possible, under the hoofs of her horses, or under the wheels of her carriage; those remaining alive will be admitted to the entertainment *free*, and will hear part of the concert.'—'They are to hear it???'—'Yes, indeed. At the end of her second cavatina they will loudly proclaim that it is no longer possible for them to endure the remainder of their prosaic existence, and thereupon they will proceed to stab themselves through the heart with the daggers I am showing you. No pistols, if you please, since these are an instrument lacking in nobility; moreover, their report might be distasteful to *her*.' The bargain was struck, and its terms would doubtless have been carried out honestly by the parties concerned had not the American police, as vexatious and unintelligent a body as is to be met with, intervened to prevent it. This proves that even among artistic nations there are always a lot of narrow-minded, cold-hearted, gross—in a word, envious—men. Thus it was that the *claque unto death* was not put into practice, and a number of poor people were denied a new means of earning their livelihood.

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"An amateur told me of yet another serious wrong perpetrated by the Public Works Department of that strange country.

"The press has repeatedly told us of the immense railway undertaken for the purpose of establishing transcontinental communication between the Atlantic Ocean and California. We simple Europeans had thought that it was to be constructed merely to facilitate the travel of the explorers of the new El Dorado. We were mistaken. Quite the contrary, the object was more an artistic than a philanthropic and commercial one. Those hundreds of leagues of iron roads were voted by the States to allow the pioneers wandering among the Rocky Mountains and on the banks of the Sacramento to come and hear Jenny Lind, without wasting too much of their time over this indispensable pilgrimage. But owing to some odious cabal, the work, far from being finished, had hardly been begun when *she* arrived. For such carelessness on the part of the American Government it is hard to find the fitting word; and it will readily be conceived that *she*, so humane and kind as *she* is, complained bitterly about it. As a result these poor seekers after gold, of every age and sex, were obliged to undertake this long and perilous continental crossing when already exhausted by their arduous labours, afoot, on mule-back, and to undergo unheard-of sufferings. Placers were abandoned, excavations remained yawning, the buildings in San Francisco stood unfinished, and heaven knows when work was resumed. This may be the cause of very serious disturbances in the commercial relations of the entire world. . . ."

"Come now," said Bacon, "do you pretend to make us believe that . . .?"

"No, not another word will I say; you might be entitled to believe I am giving a retroactive puff to Mr. Barnum, when, in the simplicity of my heart, I am merely translating into ordinary prose the poetic rumours that have come to us from too fortunate America."

"Why do you say 'retroactive puff'? Is Mr. Barnum no longer operating?"

"I cannot tell you with certainty, although it is hardly probable that such a man would remain inactive; but he no longer *puffs* Jenny Lind. Are you ignorant of the fact that the admirable virtuoso (I am speaking in all seriousness this time), no doubt tired of being mixed up in the eccentric achievements of the Romans who were exploiting her, suddenly retired from the world to get

married, and now lives happy out of the reach of puffing? She has just married in Boston Mr. Goldschmidt, a young pianist and composer from Hamburg, whom we had the pleasure of applauding in Paris some years ago. Her marriage, an artistic one, evoked the following pretty compliment from a French grammarian of Philadelphia: 'She has seen princes and archbishops at her feet, but has refused to be one herself.' This constitutes a catastrophe for the directors of lyric theatres in both hemispheres. It explains the haste with which London impresarios have just sent trustworthy agents out on the *road*, for the purpose of capturing all the sopranos of any standing they can lay their hands on. Unfortunately quantity can never take the place of quality in the matter of captures of this sort. Moreover, were the contrary true, there do not exist throughout the world sufficient mediocre singers to make one Jenny Lind."

"It is all over, then," said Winter woefully, replacing in its case his bassoon, from which not a note had come forth during the evening; "we shall never hear her again! . . ."

"I am afraid so. Emperor Barnum is to blame for this ending; it is positive proof of the good sense of the proverb: *Excess in all things is a mistake.*

NINTH EVENING

The Paris Opéra.—London's Lyric Theatres.—A Moral Study



HEY are giving a French comic opera, etc.; followed by an Italian ballet, also etc.

The musicians are still pondering over the course of Roman history we went through together during the preceding evenings, and are indulging in the most extraordinary comments on the subject. But Dimsky, who is keener than his colleagues to learn everything connected with the musical practices of Paris, once more puts a question to me, to wit:

"Now that you have told us of the habits of the Romans," he says, "pray let us hear something about their principal stage of operations. You must have some singular revelations to make on that subject."

"Revelations? For you alone, perhaps; the word you use is the right one, but for you only; for I can assure you that the mysteries of the Paris Opéra have long ago been revealed."

"In this town we are not well up in what you say is known to everybody, so please go on."

"Yes, tell us all you know about the Opéra," say the other musicians.

.. "Si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros. . . ."

"What's that he is saying?" inquires Bacon, as his colleagues form a close circle about me.

"He says," replies Corsino, "that if we are so anxious to learn the misfortunes of the Parisians . . . we must hold our tongues, and beg the player of the big drum not to beat it so hard."

"And this is again from Virgil, is it not?"

"Exactly so."

"Why does he talk Greek every now and then?"

"Because it makes him look learned, and that goes down. It is a little foible we must overlook. He is beginning, so hush!"

"Gentlemen, do you know a fable of our La Fontaine beginning with these two lines:

*Un jour sur ses longs pieds allait je ne sais où
Le héron au long bec emmanché d'un long cou?"*

"Of course, of course, who does not? Do you take us for Boto-cudos?"¹

"Well, then, the Opéra, that great theatre with its big orchestra, its big choruses, the big subsidy granted to it by the Government, its numerous staff, its immense decorations, imitates in more points than one the piteous bird of the fable. Now we see it standing motionless, *sleeping on one leg*; now it strides along with an agitated look, going whither no one can say, seeking its food in the tiniest streams, not turning up its nose at the gudgeon it ordinarily disdains, and whose name of itself irritates its gastronomic pride.

"But the unfortunate bird has been wounded in the wing; it walks, since it is unable to fly, and its strides, however hurried, will all the less bring it to its goal, since it does not know itself towards which point of the horizon it must shape its course.

"The Opéra, like all other theatres, is after money and honours; it would like glory and fortune. Big successes bring both; fine works sometimes reap great successes; great composers and clever authors alone create fine works. These works, radiant with intelligence and genius, appear as living and beautiful only in a performance that is equally living and beautiful, impassioned, delicate, faithful, grand, brilliant, animated. The excellence of the performance depends not only on the selection of the executants, but on the spirit pervading them. Now, this spirit would be excellent if all of them had not long ago made a discovery that, by discouraging them, has brought about indifference, and, in its train, boredom and disgust. They have found out that one profound passion rules over all the inclinations, fetters all the ambitions, and absorbs all the thoughts of the Opéra; in a word, the Opéra is madly in love with mediocrity. In order to possess, do honour to, give a home to, pet, honour, and glorify mediocrity, it stops short of nothing, there is no sacrifice from which it will not shrink, no hard work it will not impose upon itself enthusiastically. With the best of intentions, in absolute good faith, it rises to the point of enthusiasm for platitude, admires fervently what

¹ An Indian tribe in Brazil. (Translator's note.)

is colourless, flames up and boils over in its love of the lukewarm; it would like to be a poet to sing the praises of prose. Moreover, as it has noticed that the public has passed from boredom into indifference and has long since resigned itself to accept everything set before it without approval or censure, the Opéra has rightly come to the conclusion that it is master in its own house and that it can fearlessly give free rein to all the transports of its fiery passions, and worship mediocrity on the pedestal before which it burns incense to it.

"To secure so fine a result, with the help of those of its ministers whose easy nature asks for nothing better than to be left free to act in this way, it has so wearied, worn out, impeded, and limed all its artists that several of them, hanging their harps on the willow-trees by the river-bank, have given it up and wept. 'What else could we do?' they say nowadays; *'Illic stetimus et flevimus!'*

"Others have become indignant and come to loathe their task, while many have gone to sleep; the philosophers among them draw their salaries, and jestingly parody Mazarin's saying: ² 'The Opéra does not sing, but it pays.' The orchestra alone makes it difficult for the Opéra to lower its level. The greater part of its members being virtuosi of the highest order, they constitute a portion of the Conservatoire's famous orchestra; they are thus naturally in contact with art in its purest form, and also with a choice public; hence the ideas they preserve, and the resistance they oppose to the efforts tending to enslave them. But given time and bad works, there is no musical organization whose spirit cannot be broken, whose fire cannot be extinguished, whose vigour cannot be destroyed, whose glorious progress cannot be slackened.

" 'So, you clever gentlemen,' the Opéra repeatedly says to them 'you scoff at my singers, you poke fun at my new scores! I know how to bring you to heel, so here is an opera in many acts, the beauties of which you are going to relish. Three grand rehearsal would be sufficient to get it going—that's the old-fashioned way—so you will have twelve or fifteen; do nothing in haste, that's wha

² Mazarin's saying is: "*Qu'ils chantent, ils payeront!*" He made the remark on the occasion of the imposition of fresh taxation, which gave rise to the *mazarinad* (derisive songs). Originally the words were: "*S'ils content la cansonette, ils pagent,*" now generally quoted as above. Mazarin being an Italian said *pagaront*, from the Italian *pagare*. Dumas mentions the saying in *Vingt Ans après*, p. 15. (Translator's note.)

I believe in. You will play it some ten times—that is, until it no longer attracts a soul—and then we will pass on to another work of the same kind and of equal merit. So! you think it insipid, common, cold, and flat? I have the honour to present you with an opera full of galops and written in a hurry, which you will be so good as to study with the same love as its predecessor; and in a short time you will have another from the pen of a composer who has never composed anything, which I hope you will dislike still more. You complain that the singers sing out of tune and cannot keep time; on their side, they complain that your accompaniments are too rigid; henceforth you will relax your rhythm and wait on any one note until they have finished, so as to allow them to swell out on their favourite note, and then give them extra time to take a breath. And now here is a ballet which is to last from nine o'clock until midnight. The big drum must be heard all through it; I mean that you are to struggle against that and make yourselves heard all the same. Good heavens, gentlemen, it isn't a matter this time of accompaniments, and I don't pay you to count pauses.'

"So much of this kind of pressure is brought to bear on the noble but unfortunate orchestra that I really fear it will end in becoming despondent, then fall into a sickly somnolence, thence into depression and languor, and finally into mediocrity, the chasm into which the Opéra drives everything that comes under its sway.

"The choruses themselves are educated in a different fashion; in order not to apply to them the painful system used towards the orchestra with so little success up to the present time, the Opéra seeks to replace its old choristers by choristers ready trained—that is, quite mediocre ones. In this instance, however, it overreaches itself, for in a very short while they become worse, and thus lose the speciality for which they had been engaged. Hence the wonderful charivaris so often heard, more especially in the scores of Meyerbeer; only a clatter of this sort is capable of rousing the public from its lethargy; it calls forth shouts of reprobation and manifestations of indignant horror, the effect of which is not mediocre, and should, in this respect at least, greatly displease the Opéra.

"And yet the poor public has been nowadays completely subjugated, as I have already told you; it has been broken in; it is as submissive and gentle as a well-behaved child. In the old days

the public was treated to masterpieces in their entirety, to operas in which every part was beautiful, the recitatives true and admirable, the dance tunes exquisite; there was nothing to brutalize the ear, and even the language was treated with respect; and yet the public was bored. . . . Strenuous methods were thereupon employed to rouse it from its somnolence; it was given high C's from the chest, big drums, side-drums, organs, military bands, antique trumpets, tubas as big as locomotive chimneys, bells, cannon, horses, cardinals under a canopy, emperors covered with gold, queens wearing diadems, funerals, weddings, feasts, and again the canopy, always the famous canopy, the magnificent canopy, the beplumed canopy, carried by four officers, as in 'Malbrouck,'³ jugglers, skaters, choirboys, censors, monstres, crosses, banners, processions, orgies of priests and naked women, the bull Apis, any quantity of calves, screech-owls, bats, the five hundred fiends of hell, to suit every taste—indeed, the whole bag of tricks, the end of the world . . . with a few insipid cavatinas and a large number of *claqueurs* thrown in. The poor deluded public, dumbfounded at such a cataclysm, finally opened its eyes wide and its mouth still wider and remained awake, but silent, considering itself defeated, without hope of getting back its own, compelled to give in.

"And so it is that, dog-tired, broken, worn out after such a contest, like Sancho after the siege of Baratania, it brightens up with joy when it seems that an effort is being made to supply it with the merest tranquil enjoyment. It drinks in with gusto a refreshing bit of music, revels in it, inhales it. Yes, it has been subdued to such a point that it does not even dare complain of the awful diet on which it has been put. At a feast, were it to be given soap soup, living crayfish, roast crows, ginger custard, and if it could find amid so many atrocious messes just a little bit of barley sugar to suck, it would be in the seventh heaven, and say, as it licked its lips: 'Our host is just splendid! Three cheers for him! I am more than content!' Now comes the good side of the matter; the submission of the public having become evident, as indeed it has, and its errors of judgment being no longer feared, since it no longer pronounces judgment, composers have all decided, they

³ A reference to the popular French song: "*Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre.*" (Translator's note.)

say, to 'chance it,' and to produce henceforth masterpieces only."

"A happy thought!" exclaims Corsino, "for we have been clamouring a long while with all our heart for this *coup d'état*."

"None the less, it would be a pity to produce too many masterpieces at the Opéra; it is to be hoped that composers will be reasonable, and put reasonable bounds to their inspired fecundity. In this theatre enough fine scores have already been lost. After the first three or four performances, as soon as the influence of the composer no longer acts directly on his interpreters, the performances too often go from the mediocre to the worse, more especially in the beautifully finished works. It is not that, generally speaking, insufficient time is devoted to the study of them, for here is the process in vogue up to the present, and the manner in which, probably, a new work is still rehearsed.

"At the outset no thought at all is devoted to it; next, when it begins to be admitted that it might not be out of place to think a little over it, they rest awhile; and they are right. Hang it! It is of no use risking, through overwork, a premature exhaustion of one's intelligence! By dint of a series of efforts thus wisely calculated, one gets to the point of announcing a rehearsal. On that day the manager rises early, shaves himself closely, repeatedly scolds his servants for their slowness, hastily swallows a cup of coffee, and . . . goes off into the country. Several actors are so good as to attend the rehearsal; five of them drop in one by one. The appointed hour being twelve thirty, they tranquilly talk politics, trade, railways, fashions, the money-market, dancing, philosophy, until two o'clock. Then the accompanist ventures to point out to these ladies and gentlemen that he has been waiting a long time for them to be good enough to open their parts and study them. On hearing this suggestion, each actor decides to ask for his own part, turns over the leaves for a moment, shakes off the sand,⁴ cursing the copyist the while, and they all begin . . . to chatter a little less. 'But how are we going to sing this? The first piece is a sextet, and there are only five of us; that is to say, we were five a moment ago, but L. has just left; his solicitor sent for him on important business. Now, it is impossible for us to rehearse a sextet when there are only four of us. Suppose we put it off to

⁴ At that period, sand was used instead of blotting-paper. It was artificially coloured, and shaken out of a castor. (Translator's note.)

another time?" Whereupon all disappear as slowly as they came.

"No rehearsal can be held on the day following, for it is a Sunday, nor the day after that, as it is a Monday, and there is a performance that day. Ordinarily speaking, nothing is done on those days at the Opéra; even the actors who are not appearing in the performance of the evening are resting with all their might, thinking of the hard work before their comrades. Tuesday, then! The clock strikes one; enter the two actors who failed to turn up at the first rehearsal, but none of the others put in an appearance. That is only fair; they waited on the first day, the absent ones made them *waste their time*, and they owe it to their dignity to retaliate. At a quarter to three all are present except the second tenor and the first bass. The ladies are charming, in an adorable mood, and so one of them suggests that the sextet be commenced without the bass. 'What does it matter? We shall at least see what our separate parts are like.'—'One moment, please, gentlemen,' says the accompanist, 'I am trying to understand this chord; I can hardly make out the notes. What can you expect? It is impossible to play a twenty-line score at sight.'—'Oh! You don't know what there is in the score, and you come here to teach us our parts,' says Madame S., who is in the habit of speaking her mind. 'My dear man, if you would be kind enough to study it a little at home before coming here!'—'As that is more than you could do with your own part, madame, for you can't read music, I can't invite you to go and do likewise.'—'Now, then, don't be personal!'—'Let's begin!' says D., impatiently. *Ritornello*, D.'s recitative, vocal ensemble on the chord of F major. Horrors! An A flat! It was you, M.'—'I! How could I have sung A flat when I have not even opened my mouth? I am a sick man; I can stand it no longer. I must go to bed.'—'So now our sextet with four singers is reduced to a trio, but a real trio, a trio of three. It's better than nothing. Let us proceed: "*La Grèce doit enfin. . . La Grèce . . .*"—'Ha ha! "*La graisse d'oie!*"'⁵ You have stolen that pun from Odry! Stunning! Ha, ha, ha!'—'My word, she does enjoy a laugh, that Madame S.,' says Madame G., breaking a needle in the pocket-handkerchief she had been embroidering.—'Oh, don't let

⁵ *Grèce* and *graisse* (*Greece* and *fat*) are pronounced almost alike, and *doit* and *d'oie* (*goose*) are pronounced the same way. This pun is also to be met with in Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène*. (Translator's note.)

us clever people become melancholy. You look *piquée*,⁶ madam. You must not allow yourself to be *piquée* by a pun. Ha, ha, ha! Another good pun!—‘*Buona sera a tutti* (Good-night, all),’ says D., rising. ‘You are delightfully witty, my dears, but far too studious. It is now a quarter past three; we must never rehearse after three. It is Tuesday today; I may have to sing in *Les Huguenots* next Friday, and so I have to spare myself. Besides, I am hoarse, and it is only through an excess of zeal that I have turned up at rehearsal today. Hum, hum!’ They all leave. The eight or ten meetings that follow resemble more or less the first two. So it goes on for a whole month, after which they succeed in rehearsing almost seriously during a whole hour, three times a week; actually twelve hours of study in a month. The manager always takes great care to stimulate his artists by keeping away; and if a small one-act opera, announced for the first of May, can finally be produced at the end of August, he will be entitled to throw out his chest and say: ‘Oh, goodness me, a mere bagatelle. We put that on in forty-eight hours!’

“London impresarios are truly the men to get the most out of time; it is through the English that the art of accelerated musical rehearsals has been brought to a degree of splendour unknown to other nations. I cannot pay a higher tribute of praise to the method they follow than to say that it is the very reverse of the one adopted in Paris. On one side of the British Channel, to learn and stage a five-act opera, ten months are required; on the other, ten days. In London the most important thing for an impresario is the poster. He has only to plaster it with celebrated names, to announce celebrated works, or to describe as celebrated the obscure works of celebrated composers, enforcing this epithet with all the power of the press . . . and the trick is done. But as the public’s demand for novelties is insatiable and curiosity is its dominant impulse, it is necessary for the player who wishes to win it over to him to shuffle the cards very frequently. Thenceforth it becomes imperative to act quickly rather than well, and with extraordinary quickness, even to carrying celerity to the point of absurdity. The manager is aware that his audience will not notice the defects in the performance if they are adroitly disguised; that it will never thi

⁶ *Piquée* means both *piqued* and *pricked*; hence the pun.

discovering the ravages caused in a new work by the lack of ensemble and the uncertainty of the chorus, its coldness, its ignoring of delicate shades, the wrong tempi, the mutilated features, and the ideas given a meaning contrary to that of the composer. He reckons enough on the amour-propre of the singers entrusted with the chief parts to feel sure that, placed as they are in a conspicuous position, they at least will make superhuman efforts to do themselves honour before the public, in spite of the short time allowed them for preparation. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what takes place, and it suffices. Nevertheless there are occasions when, in spite of their willingness, the most zealous actors cannot make a success of it. Long will be remembered the first performance of the *Prophète* at Covent Garden, when Mario stopped short several times, not having had enough time to learn his part. It would consequently be useless to say, when it is a question of producing a new work: 'They don't know it, it doesn't go at all, it must be studied for another three weeks!'—'Three weeks!' the impresario would exclaim, 'you are not going to get three days; you are going to perform it tomorrow.' 'But, sir, there is a big ensemble, the biggest in the opera, of which the chorus has not yet seen a note; they can't do it by guess-work, improvise it on the stage!'—'Well, then, suppress the ensemble; there will still be enough music left.'—'There is a little part, sir, they have forgotten to cast, and we have nobody to take it.'—'Then give it to Madame X., and let her learn it tonight.'—'Madame X. is already cast for another part.'—'All right; all she has to do is to change her costume, and she can play both parts. Do you imagine that I am going to hold my theatre up for things like that?'—'The orchestra, sir, has not yet had time to rehearse the ballet music.'—'Let it play it without rehearsal! Come, now, give me a rest. The new opera is announced for tomorrow; the seats are sold, and all's well.'

"It is the dread of being out-distanced by their rivals, coupled with the necessity of daily covering enormous expenses, that is the cause among impresarios of the fever, the *delirium furens*, from which art and artists suffer so intensely. The director of a London opera-house is a man who carries a barrel of gunpowder without being able to get rid of it, and is pursued with flaming torches. The unfortunate fellow runs as fast as his legs will carry him, falls down, gets up again, jumps torrents, palisades, streams,

and bogs, knocks down everything he meets, and would trample on the bodies of his father and children if they got in his way.

"These, I must admit, are the melancholy necessities of the position; but what is more deplorable is that this brutal haste of English theatres in the preparations for musical performances should become a habit, and that it should be regarded by some people as a special talent worthy of admiration. 'We put this opera on in a fortnight,' is said on the one side, 'And we in ten days,' retorts the other. 'And a pretty mess you have made of it,' the author would say, were he present. The result of the examples quoted of certain 'successes' of this nature is that directors no longer stop at anything, and contempt for all the qualities that alone can make a performance a good one, contempt even for all the *necessities* of art, goes on increasing. During the brief existence of the English Grand Opera at Drury Lane in 1848, the director, whose repertory was exhausted, was at his wits' end, so one fine day he said to his conductor in all seriousness: 'There is only one thing left for me to do, and that is to produce *Robert le Diable* next Wednesday. We therefore have six days in which to get it up.'—'First rate!' was the reply, 'and we will rest on the seventh day. Have you the English version of the opera?'—'No, but it can be done in a jiffy.'—'The score?'—'No, but . . .'—'The costumes?'—'Devil a one!'—'Do the actors know the music of their parts, and have the chorus theirs?'—'No, no, no. Nobody knows anything, I haven't anything, but it must be done.' The conductor kept a straight face; he saw that the poor fellow was losing his mind, or rather that he had lost it already; if that were only all he had lost!

"On another occasion the same impresario having conceived the idea of staging the *Linda di Chamouni* of Donizetti, the translation of which he had this time had the sense to procure, the actors and the chorus having most extraordinarily had the necessary time to study it, a full rehearsal was called. The orchestra assembled, actors and chorus were at their posts, and everyone waited. 'Well, why don't you begin?' asked the director.—'Nothing I should like better,' replied the conductor, 'but there is no music on the stands.'—'What! Incredible! I'll have it brought.' He sends for the head of the copying staff, and says to him: 'Here, put the music on the stands.'—'What music?'—'Good heavens, that of *Linda di Chamouni*.'—'But I haven't any. I was never told to copy the orchestral

parts of that work.' Thereupon the musicians rise from their seats with shouts of laughter, and beg leave to go away, since the only thing forgotten in connexion with the opera was merely *the music*. . . .

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I break off for a moment. This story oppresses, humiliates me, awakens sad thoughts in me. Besides, just listen to that delightful dance tune that has strayed among the rubbish of your Italian ballet. . . .

"Oh! Oh! It is up to us!" exclaim the violinists, grasping their bows; "we must play that like masters, for it is masterly." And indeed the whole orchestra executes with irreproachable unity, expression, and delicacy of nuance the admirable *andante* that breathes the voluptuous poetry of the fairyland of the East. It is hardly finished when most of the musicians hasten to quit their stands, leaving two violins, a double-bass, the trombones, and the big drum to deal with the remainder of the ballet. "We had noticed that bit," says Winter, "and we had reckoned on playing it *con amore*, but it is you who nearly made us miss it." "But where does it come from, whose is it, where have you heard it?" says Corsino to me.—"It is from Paris; I heard it in the ballet of *La Péri*, the music of which is by a German composer, whose merit is equal to his modesty, Burgmüller by name."—"It is very beautiful, of a divine languor."—"It makes one dream of Mohammed's houris! That music, gentlemen, accompanies the entry of the Peri. Were you to hear it in the setting for which the composer conceived it, you would admire it still more. It is really a masterpiece." The musicians, without having come to any understanding among themselves, return to their stands, and pencil on the page of the orchestral parts where the *andante* appears the name of Burgmüller.

To resume my sad narrative.

The managers of our Paris Opéra, among whom there have been men of intelligence and talent, have from time immemorial been selected from among men who had the minimum of love for and knowledge of music. There have even been some who absolutely loathed it. One of them said to me personally that every score that was twenty years old was only fit to be thrown into the fire; that Beethoven was an *old imbecile*, whose works a handful of lunatics affected to admire, but who as a matter of fact *had never composed anything that was tolerable*.

The musicians explode. . . !. . . !. . . !!! (and other remarks that are not to be put into writing).

Well-written music, another director was wont to say, is music that *does not spoil anything* in an opera. Hence it is not surprising that such directors do not know how to set going their immense musical machine, and that at every opportunity they treat in so cavalier a fashion the composers whom they do not believe they need or are likely to need. Spontini, whose two masterpieces, *La Vestale* and *Cortez*, were sufficient to "feed" the repertory of the Opéra for twenty-five years, was at the end of his days actually barred in that theatre and could never succeed in getting *an audience* from the manager. Rossini, were he to return to France, would have the pleasure of seeing the score of his *Guillaume Tell* turned completely topsyturvy, and cut by a third. For a long time *the half of the fourth act of Moses in Egypt* was played before his very face as a curtain-raiser to a ballet! Hence the delightful repartee credited to him. Meeting him one day, the director of the Opéra greeted him with: "Well, dear *maestro*, we are playing the fourth act of your *Moses* tomorrow." "What! The whole of it?" was Rossini's rejoinder.

The execution and mutilations inflicted from time to time at the Opéra on *Der Freischütz* create a real indignation, if not in Paris, which nothing can make indignant, at least in the rest of Europe, where Weber's masterpiece is admired.

We know the insolent contempt with which Mozart, towards the end of the last century, was treated by the great men who were then at the head of the *Académie royale de musique*. Having hurriedly sent about his business the little harpsichord-player who had had the audacity to offer to write for their theatre, they promised him, however, by way of compensation, and as a special favour, to give a *short orchestral piece* of his at one of the *concerts spirituels* of the Opéra, and commissioned him to write it. Mozart soon completed his work and hastened to hand it to the director.

A few days later, the concert at which it was to be given having been advertised, Mozart, not seeing his name on the program, returns full of anxiety to see the management; he is, as usual, kept waiting a long time in an ante-room, where, rummaging idly among a heap of papers lying on the table, he finds—what do you think?—his manuscript, which the director had tossed there. On seeing his

patron, Mozart quickly asks him for an explanation of his conduct. "Your little symphony?" replies the director; "yes, here it is. There is no time now to give it to the copyist. *I had forgotten it.*"

Ten or twelve years later, when Mozart was with the immortal dead, the Paris Opéra considered itself bound to produce *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, but mutilated, soiled, disfigured, vilely travestied by wretches whose names it should be forbidden to pronounce. Such is our Opéra, such it was, and such it will be.

TENTH EVENING

*A Few Words about the Present State of Music, its Defects, its Misfortunes and its Troubles.—The Institution of the Tack.—
A Victim of the Tack*



FRENCH opera is being performed, etc., etc.

As I enter the orchestra after the overture I find the musicians (the player of the big drum and the side-drums excepted) engaged in listening to the reading of a brochure that excites their hilarity.

"We made you feel morose yesterday, by getting you on the subject of the lyric theatres of Paris and London," says Dimsky, extending his hand to me; "but here is something that will revive your good humour. Just listen to the critical pleasantry indulged in by one of your compatriots, who does not sign his name, over the present state of music in France. His ideas resemble your own and confirm everything you have already said to us on the same subject. Begin reading it again, Winter."

"No, our hearer would laugh at my English accent."

"At your American accent you mean, you Yankee!"

"Well, then, you read it, Corsino."

"I have an Italian accent."

"You, then, Kleiner."

"I have a German accent; read it yourself, Dimsky."

"I have a Polish accent."

"Come, I see that it is a conspiracy to make me read the brochure, on the ground that I am French. Let me have it."

Winter hands me the pamphlet, and, during the performance of a long trio sung *as it deserves to be*, I read what follows:

*A Few Words about the Present State of
Music, its Defects, its Misfortunes, and
its Troubles*

It is well known that the times are hardly favourable for any artistic movement, and so it is that music hardly stirs; it slumbers! It might be considered dead were it not for the feverish motions

of its hands, which open wide and then close convulsively during its sleep, as if they sought to grasp something. Then it dreams, and speaks aloud in its dream. Its brain is full of strange visions; it puts questions to the Minister of the Interior, it threatens, it complains. "Give me money," it cries out in a dull guttural tone, "give me a lot of money or I shall close my theatres, give my singers unlimited leave, and, upon my word, Paris, France, Europe, the world and the Government may get on afterwards as best they can. If the paying public does not come to me, is it my fault? It does not even want to come without paying. Is that my fault? And if I haven't sufficient money to pay it to come, is that my fault? Oh, if I had money to purchase hearers, you would see crowds at my festivals, commerce and the arts would flourish once more, the universe would be born again to joy and health, and we should all of us snap our fingers at the insolent virtuosi, the haughty composers, who allege that there is nothing artistic or musical about me, and that my title is a mere falsehood."

Bah! the Minister heeds its threats as little as he does its complaints; he stuffs the key of his safe into the deepest recesses of his pocket and tranquilly replies with terrible good sense: "I do indeed, my poor dear Music, appreciate your reasoning; you wish to be indemnified for your losses, on condition that were you ever to make any profits, you would keep them. This is a convenient, excellent, delightful system for you; I admire it, but must abstain from putting it into practice. Proposals like yours can be made to royal brigands, rascally emperors, horrible absolute monarchs rolling in gold, gorged with the sweat of the people, but not to the ministers of a young republic, suffering from birth from certain defects of constitution which compel it to think of its health above all things; and in these days of cholera, physicians are expensive. Moreover, these governmental chiefs without liberty, equality, and paternity, these kings themselves, to call them by their right names, would certainly not surrender at the first words of your irreverent summons. The greater part of these idlers have consecrated much time to the arts and to literature; some of them know you, my dear old Music, and would show no mercy to any of your faults. They might even say: 'If gentlefolks give you a wide berth, mademoiselle, it is because you too often frequent bad company. If your purse is empty, it is because you spend too much money

on knick-knacks, ornaments of doubtful taste, tinsel and glittering things of all kinds, costly and useless articles suitable only to tight-rope walkers. If today your affairs are in a bad state, if your ventures fail, if you are derided, if you are heading for ruin, do not blame anything but the detestable counsels you listen to and your own stubbornness in rejecting the sensible warnings that fortune sends you occasionally. Besides, where have you selected your advisers, your stewards, your guiding directors? Silly creature that you are! Is it not patent that those about you are your most cruel enemies? Some of them, who have no love for anything in the world, hate you all the more because they are compelled to look as if they loved you; others detest you because they know nothing of what concerns you, and feel in their innermost being the immense ridicule they incur by performing functions for which they are totally unfit; others again, who used to worship you, now hate and despise you because they know you too well. Shame on you! You are a brainless harlot, a real Opéra strumpet, *a business slut*, as Voltaire said, but nevertheless one who knows nothing about business matters, absurd in the choice of her stewards, and placing in them a faith that is a close neighbour to stupidity. What should you say if a State like England, for instance, were to entrust the command of its navy to a Parisian dancer who has never seen any other manœuvres but those of the sails and ropes of a theatre, or to a Burgundian peasant incapable of steering a ferry-boat on the Saône? . . .

"That will do now! Don't bother us; your entreaties are a nuisance; were you what you should be, sensitive, intelligent, passionate, devoted, enthusiastic, proud, and courageous; if you had energetically put all those people in their place, and kept better your own; had you preserved something of your noble origin; if the princess still showed herself in you, kings might come to your rescue and receive you at their courts; but it is not for creatures of your sort that they constitute a refuge. You no longer possess even the seduction of vulgar charms. Pale and wrinkled, you have come down to painting your face blue, white, and red, like female savages. Very soon you will be daubing your eyelashes with black and wearing gold rings in your nose. Your talent has undergone a similar metamorphosis. No longer do you vocalize; you vociferate. What do you mean by forcing your voice on every note, pausing

with a yell on the penultimate beat of every melodic phrase, no matter what may be the syllable on which it ends, or the meaning of the piece, or the movement thus given to the ensemble and to the intention of the author? What about all the liberties you take with the finest texts, suppressing high notes and low notes in order to force the melody to run upon the five or six tones in the middle register of your voice, sounds that you then inflate to the point of breathlessness, making the melody and the singing resemble the deplorable songs of suburban night-prowlers, the wine-sodden bel-lowing of tavern Orpheuses? Tell me, you thrice-silly creature, where you learnt that you were free to chop up a melody and make verses of fourteen syllables by suppressing the elisions, so as to take breath more frequently. What language do you speak? Is it that of Auvergne or of Lower Brittany? Clermontois and Quim-pérois would not own it. You must be suffering from phthisis in the third degree that everywhere and for ever you must needs take time to bring forth from your chest the smallest melodic line of any rapidity, whence results that continual delay in the entries and in the attack that is so destructive of all regularity, all assurance, that painfully asphyxiates your hearers, and that, contrasting with the precision of the orchestra, creates in the ensembles the hideous hullabaloo of contrary rhythms of the ailing timepieces in a watch-maker's hospital. You are so little careful for the indispensable agreement between instruments and voices, unfortunate and degenerate Muse, that to please your producers (who only laugh at you) you place the chorus of your operas at such a distance from the orchestra that it becomes impossible for them to agree rhythmically with it. What are you thinking about when you try to keep together the four voices of a quartet the upper parts of which are down-stage, the basses up-stage, forty paces away, while the altos and the tenors, hidden by the supports of the wings, are unable, owing to the processions and the dancing groups surrounding them, to catch the least glimpse of the conductor's bow on the horizon of the footlights? But to say that you pretend to get a quartet ensemble in this way is to flatter you queerly. You do not make any such pretence. On the contrary, the hateful muddle and the cacophonies that result leave you utterly unconcerned; trifles of this kind do not disturb you much. All the same, this careless indifference of yours shocks many people, and the number

of those thus shocked, swelled by all the discontented ones whom you merely bore, finally constitutes the huge public that has formed the habit of never setting foot in your house. We are speaking now of your misdeeds in the theatre only; it would take too long to set before you all your doings elsewhere. Go your way; you excite our pity, but we keep our gold for more worthy folk than you. What! Threats! . . . You obnoxious madwoman! Go; who is preventing you? The country will be none the worse for your absence. We shall regret you? . . . Not a bit, my dear; you are

Un peu trop forte en gueule et trop impertinente
(Too full of 'jaw,' and too impudent)."

This is the pretty compliment, unhappy Muse, with which those pitiless monarchs might show you the door. We republicans, who are proof against the patriotic air and accustomed to out-of-tune singing, will not treat you so roughly. We shall not drive you out of beautiful France, and you shall be free to die a natural death there when you no longer possess hearth and home.

Music, opening her eyes dimmed with tears, replies: "Yes, I no longer doubt that I shall die a slow and ignominious death. You thought I was sleeping, but I have heard only too plainly the horrible things you have been saying to me. And yet is it humane of you, sir, is it even fair, to blame me for the intimacies to which I am condemned, the false friends whom I am forced to frequent, who, moreover, treating me like a slave, give me orders against which I rebel, and impose on me their own crazy whims? Was it I who selected such awful associates? Are they of my own choice, or of that of your predecessors, who handed me over to them fettered and defenceless? You know it full well; in this respect, at least, I am innocent. I am aware that my threats of closing down are ridiculous; it is from force of habit that I repeated them just now. Alas! I have recently learnt it only too well! I closed my theatres under pretence of repairs, and Parisians worried about them just about as much as they would over repairs to the Great Wall of China. You throw in my face my vocal excesses; you are right, I feel it in my innermost being, but for the past ten years I have managed to exist in Italy only through them. In France, where the theatrical public is represented by salaried men seated in the centre of the pit, I can exist only by flattering these gentry,

and that debauch of song delights them. If I do not stimulate their applause, I get no other, and then people say that I am not successful; the conclusion follows that I am devoid of talent; the public, on hearing this, believes it and does not patronize me; hence my poverty and despair. You do not and never will know, sir, what it is to cry out in the desert.

"An audience highly paid by the nation is assured to your slightest speeches, and I should gladly content myself with those left you on days when the deputies barely constitute a quorum. In the Chamber, at least, if you are repeatedly interrupted, asked questions, nay, insulted, it is proof that you are listened to in a more or less tumultuous fashion and that your audience is impassioned with or against your ideas; this is often painful, but it spells life. In my theatres, my heart is broken by the supreme contempt, the insulting indifference of a public that thinks a great deal about everything except about me; a public that believes itself blasé, although it has never felt anything; that, like the marquises in Molière, knows everything without having learnt anything; a public clever at raillery only, and that never deigns to hiss my pranks, because it seems to it in bad taste, or too much trouble, or perhaps—and the very thought makes me shudder—for the reason that it does not notice them. I am aware that you are going to tell me that these reasons are insufficient to justify the shameless vices to which I admit I have surrendered; you will quote a celebrated aphorism of the greatest of poets, and repeat with him *that it is better to deserve the approval of a single man of taste than to stimulate by means unworthy of art the plaudits of a house filled with a vulgar herd of spectators*.¹ Alas! the poet placed this noble sentence in the mouth of a youthful prince to whom the shocks of hunger, cold, and poverty were unknown; and I will reply to him as the actors to whom he tendered his advice would have done had they dared: Who is there who suffers more than myself from the degradation to which I see myself reduced? But the necessities of existence impose it on me imperiously, and I could not obtain even the approval of a single man of taste were

¹The words in italics are a very free rendering of the words addressed to the players by Hamlet, to wit: ". . . though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; *the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others*." (Translator's note.)

I not to exist. Assure my existence, even though it be less brilliant than was that of the Danish prince, and I shall think as he did, and put into practice his excellent lessons.

"There are in Europe, sir, States where I am free, not to say protected. In France, on the contrary, if more or less insufficient sacrifices are made in favour of some of my theatres, one seems to do one's best to paralyse the most disinterested efforts that I attempt outside the dramatic forms. Instead of being helped I am impeded in a thousand ways; I am gagged; I have to struggle against prejudices worthy of the Middle Ages. Now it is the clergy who prevent my singing the praises of God in the churches, by forbidding women to take part in my most serious works; now it is the Paris municipality that causes a musical education to be given to children and young men of the working-class, on the express condition that they are not to make any use of it. They learn for the sake of learning, and not to put what they know to good use when they have attained knowledge, just like the workmen of the first national workshops, who were made to dig holes in the ground, extract the soil from them, and bring it back the following day to fill up the holes dug on the previous one. Then when I appeal to the public in order to be able to produce a work long meditated upon, written for the sake only of the small number of men of taste the poet speaks of, without any commercial *arrière-pensée*, solely with the object of producing in broad daylight a thing that appears to me to be beautiful, I am despoiled in the name of the law, smitten with an exorbitant tax, and half killed, while the following profane words are cast at me, words that are an infernal mockery: 'It would be a mistake for you to complain, since the law authorizes us to kill you out and out.' Yes, of the gross receipts intended to just about cover the expenses incurred by me in a case of this kind, an eighth is taken from me, while a *quarter* could be legally demanded. They have the right to break both my legs; they break only one, and I must show my gratitude. All I say is true, sir, I am not exaggerating anything. At the coming of liberty, equality, and fraternity I believed for a moment in my emancipation; but I was mistaken. When the hour of the deliverance of the Negroes from slavery struck, I indulged in fresh hopes; I was again mistaken. It is settled that in France, under the monarchy as under the Republic, I must remain a slave, condemned

to compulsory labour. When I have worked seven days I may not rest on the eighth, since I owe this eighth day to the farmer, my master, who might even require me to work one day more. No one has ever had the idea of saying to the cobblers: 'You have just made eight pair of shoes; you owe *two* of them to the State, which is gracious enough to take *but one* from you.' Why, sir, why is the art of music not on the same footing as that of the cobbler? What have I, Music, done to France? In what way have I offended her? How have I deserved so hard and persistent an oppression on her part? What renders this oppression still harder and more inexplicable is the fact that France, in the eyes of the rest of Europe, has the reputation of surrounding me with care and affection. She has indeed founded institutions, such as our fine Conservatoire and the yearly prize for composition awarded by the Académie des Beaux-Arts, which continually supply me with zealous disciples, not to say prophets; but hardly is their education outlined, barely has a sense of the beautiful illuminated their souls with its twilight, than opposing institutions come and reduce to nothing these happy results, thus imparting to the favours I receive the appearance of an atrocious hoax.

Charlet, the humorist painter, must have been thinking of this when he made his charming drawing of '*Hussards en maraude* (Marauding Hussars).' Two hussars are shown standing at the door of a fowl-house; one of them holds a bag of hemp-seed, the contents of which he is scattering in front of the narrow exit, while he calls softly: 'Chick, chick, chick!' The other, armed with a sabre, chops off the heads of the poor birds as fast as they come out. Look at that lithograph once more, sir, and meditate a few moments on the meaning of the allegory. Alas! it is only too patent. The hemp-seed is the prizes of the Conservatoire and of the Académie; the sabre-cuts, you know who is inflicting these; my children are the young turkeys who suffer themselves to be thus decapitated; but were they eagles they would none the less perish."

Somewhat moved, the Minister replies: "Child, you are perhaps right; I was ignorant of most of the facts you have just given me. I am going to devote some thought to them and try to make you at least the equal of the cobbler for the future. It seems to me but fair, but it concerns the material side of the question only. As to the other, the moral, æsthetic side, as your dear Germans

y, do not forget this: the time will perhaps come when foolish orders and absurd caprices will no longer be imposed upon you; when your stewards will truly understand your interests and devote themselves to defending them; when the directors of your conscience will no more inflict humiliating and ridiculous penances upon you; when you will no longer be compelled to cohabit with your mortal enemies; when salaried men will no more usurp in theatres the functions of the public; when the public which you discourage and perhaps disgust at present will show a warm sympathy for you; but in the meantime mend your ways, change your company as well as you are able, and your language and your manners absolutely. Do not forget that it is a gross blunder to believe that incomely efforts, shouts, acts of violence, rhythmic disorder, vagueness of form, inaccuracy of design, outrages on expression and language, abuse of ornaments, senseless din, bombast or affectation, are alone capable of moving a house full even of *uninformed spectators*. These, it is true, are frequently carried away by means disavowed by sound sense and taste, but on the other hand they can hardly resist a true inspiration when it manifests itself in all its simplicity, with grandeur and energy; they will not be greatly vexed with you if you are sublime. Perhaps even, disappointed on the first day, surprised on the second, charmed on the third, they will end by showing themselves infinitely grateful to you. Have we not already seen, do we not even still see on too rare occasions, this public—which, after all, is not exclusively composed of the spectators so despised by the poet—applaud with all its might and all its heart works that are really beautiful, and virtuosi of marvellous talent? No; on this side you have nothing to fear; the education of the frequenters of your theatres is now somewhat advanced; do not hold yourself in, just be sublime, and I warrant you that all will be well. You invite me to meditate on an ingenious drawing of Charlet; for myself, I recommend to you the fable of the *'Charretier embourbé'* of La Fontaine. Read the end of it specially:

*Hercule veut qu'on se remue,
Puis il aide les gens. Regarde d'où provient
L'achoppement qui te retient,
Ôte d'autour de chaque roue*

*Ce malheureux mortier, cette maudite boue
 Qui, jusqu'à l'essieu, les enduit,
 Prends ton pic et me romps ce caillou qui te nuit,
 Comble-moi cette ornière. As-tu fait?—Oui, dit l'homme.
 Or bien, je vais t'aider, dit la voix, prends ton fouet.
 Je l'ai pris. . . . Qu'est ceci? Mon char marche à souhait!
 Hercule en soit loué! Lors la voix: Tu vois comme
 Tes chevaux aisément se sont tirés de là,
 Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera."*

"Well, what do you think of it?" Winter asks me laughingly. "I say that the pamphlet, however full it may be of droll and sad truths, produced in Paris no more effect than my *revelations* of last night would if they were printed. In Paris you may say anything you like, for the reason that no attention is paid to anything. The criticism passes, the abuse remains. Pungent words, reasons, just complaints, glide off the minds of people like drops of water off a duck's feathers." . . .

"Gentlemen, what is the matter with your Kapellmeister that he is rapping so on his desk?"

"The tenor would like to slacken the pace of the duet, but the conductor will have none of it. He is great, our conductor."

"So I notice. But do you know that the raps in which he is incidentally indulging this evening are in constant use at the Paris Opéra?"

"You don't say so."

"I do indeed, and their effect is all the more disastrous because the conductors rap, not on their desk, but on the top of the prompter's carapace in front of them; this gives each rap more sonority, and tortures the unfortunate prompter horribly. There was even one who died of the results of this torture."

"You are joking!"

"Not at all. Habeneck, having noticed some twenty years ago that the people on the stage paid scant attention to his movements, hardly ever even looked at them, and consequently often missed their entrances, conceived the idea, since he could not speak to their eyes, of warning their ear—by giving, with the extremity of his bow, this little rap of wood upon wood: *Tack!* which makes it-

self heard through all the more or less harmonious noises of the other instruments. This beat preceding the beat at the beginning of the phrase has today become the most imperious need of all the performers at the Opéra. It is the one that signals to each to begin, and that indicates the principal effects intended to be produced, even to the shades of expression. If it is the turn of the sopranos, *tack!* Your turn, ladies! Have the tenors to take up the same theme a couple of bars afterwards, *tack!* Now you, gentlemen. Have the children grouped in the centre of the stage to intone a hymn, *tack!* Come now, my little ones! Is warmth required from a singer? *tack!* sentiment, *tack!* reverie, *tack!* wit, *tack!* precision, life and spirit, *tack, tack!* The leading male dancer would not venture to 'soar' for an 'echo' without the *tack!* The prima ballerina would not feel she had either legs or *ballon*, and her smile would be more like a grimace, without the *tack*. All await this pretty little signal, failing which nothing could nowadays move or make itself heard on the stage; singers and dancers would stand there as silent and motionless as the Court in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Now this is most distasteful to the audience, and hardly worthy of an establishment that aspires to high rank among the musical and choreographic institutions of Europe. In addition it was the cause of the death of an excellent man; consequently it will not be given up."

A VICTIM OF THE TACK

A Down-Stage Story

THE victim of the tack was named Moreau. This worthy prompter was fulfilling, with exemplary correctness and in perfect peace of mind, duties more difficult than is generally supposed, when Habeneck, in order to make up for the insufficiency of telegraphic signals, invented the telephonic signal in question.

On the day when, intoxicated with his discovery, he made use of it for the first time, Moreau, who, at each rap of the learned bow, jumped up in his cave, was more surprised than angry. He supposed that a series of accidents in the performance had aroused in Habeneck an impatience the unaccustomed manifestations of which made him suffer, and that it was merely a temporary inconvenience which he, the prompter, must endure without complaint. But at

the subsequent performances the *tack* continued; in fact it increased, so charmed was its inventor with its efficacy. Each rap shook the cranium of the wretched man, who, cowering in his shelter, jumping from right to left, putting his head forward, drawing it back, twisting his neck, broke off in the middle of his lines, like a black-bird that has been shot in full song.

Mon fils, tu ne l'es plus; va, ma haine est trop (tack!). . . .

Dans mon âme ulcérée, oui, la (tack!) *nature est* (tack!). . . .

D'Etéocle et de toi tous les droits sont (tack!). . . .

And so forth. The poor man endured the whole evening a martyrdom not to be described, but one that people who, like him, are afflicted with a nervous organization will well understand. He took good care not to make any complaint, so great was the fear Habeneck inspired. Discovering, however, that it was not a matter of a caprice, a whim, a fit of bad temper, but a new institution founded at the Opéra, Moreau felt that the composure, presence of mind, and attention necessary for his task would become impossible if he were to be for ever under the threat of that *bow* of Damocles. He went to the machinist and, after having unbosomed himself of his troubles to him, said: "If you do not find a means to secure me against that hellish *tack*, I'm a gone man; it vibrates through the very marrow of my bones; it trepans me; it dislocates my cerebellum!"

"The devil! You are quite right," answered the machinist; "it is impossible for you to stand it. Stop! I have an idea; bring me your lid."

Moreau removes the roof of his little nook and brings it into the closet of the machinist, and both of them, after carefully closing the door, commence to plug, stuff, and pad it with no end of little cushions of wool, so as to make it as impervious to sound as a quilt. Behold our prompter reassured, cheered, enchanted; he goes home and sleeps the clock round, a thing that had not happened to him for a long time. On the evening of the next performance he returns to the theatre with a calm that denotes a gentle satisfaction free from irony. He was so good, so harmless a man, this poor Moreau!

Robert le Diable was being performed that evening. This opera, then quite new, was admirably performed in those days; conse-

quently the conductor was not compelled to have so frequent a recourse to the new means against which the prompter had just protected himself. For the entire first half of the first act Habeneck was visible as conductor, and nothing more. Moreau breathed and prompted with incomparable verve and happiness; he even went so far as to regret his precautions, which, he began to think, were calumnious, when, in the middle of the gaming scene, the chorus having failed to enter at the right moment, Habeneck stretches out his arm and strikes a violent blow on the padded roof of the little crib. *Pouf!* No sound whatever, no *tack*, nothing. Moreau smiles quietly, and continues dictating the words to the inattentive choristers:

Nous le tenons! nous le tenons!

Habeneck, astounded, gives another *pouf!*

"What's this?" he exclaims. "The wood no longer emits any sound. Has the rascal by any chance had his carapace padded? Wretched man! You have given me my chance! Just watch me rise to it." Whereupon, leaning sideways, he strikes the lateral wall of Moreau's cover, which the latter had imprudently neglected to pad; it promptly gives out a *tack*, more distinct, sharper, and more triumphant than the upper cover ever did, a *tack* all the more terrible for the prompter since the blows resounded right against his ear. Habeneck, with a Mephistophelean smile, avenged his own momentary discomfiture by redoubling his energy during the entire evening, making his victim endure a torture compared with which that of the Persian trickle of a drop of water must be mere child's play. To crown all, the performance over, and without appearing to understand the intention of the prompter in having his apartment upholstered, he calmly ordered the scene-shifter to remove the lining of the carapace and restore the box to its former state.

Moreau then understood that resistance was henceforth futile and that he was fast nearing the end of his days. He returned home so resigned to his fate that he slept once more. But it was to be his last sleep but one. From that day on, the *tack* redoubled, on the top, the side, the front, the back of his box; the executioner allowed no spot to remain untouched. Moreau, unnerved, broken, astounded, soon ceased to writhe; he counted the *tacks*, not like a

Mucius Scævola holding his hand over a flame without a tremor, but like an Austrian soldier receiving the hundred and twelfth stroke of the rod on his back. Habeneck remained the victor, and the institution of the *tack*, shaken for a moment, was consolidated. From that day Moreau became sad and taciturn; his hair, which had been fair, turned white and soon afterwards began to fall out. His memory went with his hair; his eyesight grew weak. Then the prompter began to make enormous blunders. The day of the revival of *Iphigénie en Aulide*, instead of prompting: "What grace, what majesty!" he exclaimed: "Mercy! What cruelty!" In another work, instead of "Supreme happiness!" he let slip: "Supreme suffering!" From the day of that *lapsus*, heartless jokers called him the *souffle-douleur*² of the Opéra. Next he fell ill, and ceased to speak. No physician could extract from him an admission of what he endured. He was only seen during his prolonged fits of drowsiness to make occasionally a slight start with his head, as if he had received a blow on the occiput. Finally one evening, after having been perfectly calm for some hours, just as his friends were beginning to believe that his condition was improving, he made once more the little start I have just referred to, and, pronouncing in gentle tones the one word *tack!* gave up the ghost.

. . . . A long silence

Sighs. . . . Then the following exclamations: (Winter) "Poor wretch!"—(Corsino) "*Ohi me! povero!*"—(Dimsky) "*Pauvre diable!*"—(Kleiner junior) "How distressing!" The conductor, heartless man, who, while listening to my sad narrative, has often been unable to refrain from silent laughter, revealed by the quakings of his abdomen, resumes his solemn mien, and says to us, as he comes off his stand: "Silence, gentlemen, the performance is over."

² A punning transformation of *souffre-douleur* (laughing-stock); literally, one who is made to endure pain; in fact, the butt of the mess. The French verb *souffler* in this connexion means to prompt. (Translator's note.)

ELEVENTH EVENING



THE musicians have come to the orchestra in dress suits and white ties; unusual excitement is reflected in their faces. Their hearts are full of respect and admiration. Their playing is admirable. No one says a word. After the finale of the second act: "It has made you cry, you!" says the first trombone to Corsino; "as for myself, I never thought I could finish my part, my lips quivered, and, towards the end of the work I could hardly bring a single sound out of my instrument."

"Thunders! What music!" exclaims one of the double-basses. "See, my knees are shaking; I am glad I was able to sit down; otherwise I could not have played a single note of the coda."

The third act is played with the same religious fervour as the first two. The conductor, who has shown himself perfect in understanding, precision, and verve, bites his handkerchief hard to conceal his emotion; he leaves his desk with face aflame, and presses my hand as he goes by.

TWELFTH EVENING

Suicide from Enthusiasm, a true tale



AN Italian opera is being performed, etc., etc.

Everybody in the orchestra is talking. Corsino, especially, speaks very loudly, gesticulates, and is very restless.

"Well, we were worked up pretty well last night!" he says to me. "All the same, I have heard talk at Paris of a Frenchman who was still more sensitive than ourselves; one who worshipped *La Vestale* to the point of taking his own life for it. This is a *story*, not a *tale*, and it proves that musical enthusiasm is a passion just as much as love is. I must tell it you."

"With pleasure."

"We are all ears."

"Do shut up, Moran."

Moran, the first horn, puts his instrument back into its case, and Corsino begins:

"I will call my story *Suicide from Enthusiasm*."

In 1808 a young musician had been filling for three years, with undisguised disgust, the part of first violin in a theatre in the south of France. The boredom that he brought with him every evening to the orchestra, where it was almost always a matter of accompanying *Le Tonnelier*, *Le Roi et le fermier*, *Les Prétendus*, or some other score of the same school, had caused him to be looked upon by his comrades as an insolent braggart about taste and science, who imagined, they said, that he alone possessed these, caring nothing for the opinion of the public, whose applause made him shrug his shoulders, or for that of the artists, whom he seemed to look upon as mere children. His contemptuous laughter and impatient gestures each time he was called upon to play some street tune had repeatedly brought down on him severe reprimands from his conductor, to whom he would long since have sent in his resignation if poverty, which always seems to choose for its victims beings of that nature, had not irrevocably nailed him in front of his oily and smoky music-stand.

Adolphe D., it can be seen, was one of those artists predestined to suffering, who, having within themselves an ideal of the beautiful, pursue it unremittingly, feeling an intense hatred for everything not resembling it. Gluck, whose scores he knew by heart, having copied them in order to be better acquainted with them, was his idol. He read, played, and sang him continually. An unfortunate amateur to whom he was giving lessons in solfeggio was once imprudent enough to tell him that Gluck's operas were merely shouts and plain-song; D., reddening with indignation, hurriedly opens the drawer of his desk, takes from it ten vouchers for money owed him by the amateur for private lessons, and, flinging them in his face, exclaims: "Leave my house; I will have none of you nor of your money, and if ever you dare cross my threshold again, I will fling you out of the window!"

It will readily be understood that, with a tolerance of this kind for the tastes of his pupils, D. did not make his fortune by giving lessons. Spontini was just then in all his glory. The brilliant success of *La Vestale*, proclaimed by the thousand voices of the press, made all the provincial dilettanti anxious to hear the score so much praised by the Parisians, and so the unfortunate theatre directors exerted themselves to get round, if not to overcome, the difficulties of performance and staging of the new work.

D.'s manager, not wanting to be left behind in the musical race, soon announced in his turn that *La Vestale* was being studied. D., as exclusive as all the fiery spirits whom a sound education has not taught to give reasons for their judgments, at first expressed a biased opinion against Spontini's opera, of which he knew not a single note.

"They pretend it is a new style, more melodious than that of Gluck; so much the worse for the composer! Gluck's melody is good enough for me; the better is the enemy of the good. I wager it is detestable."

It was in this frame of mind that he took his seat in the orchestra on the day of the first dress rehearsal. As head of his desk, it had not been necessary for him to attend the previous partial rehearsals; the other musicians, while admiring Lemoine, nevertheless found merit in Spontini and said to one another, on seeing D.: "Let us see what the great Adolphe is going to say about it!" The latter went through the rehearsal without uttering

a word, or giving a sign either of admiration or of censure. He was being strangely upset in his ideas. Fully realizing, from the very first scene, that this was an excellent and powerful work, that Spontini was a genius whose superiority he could not ignore, but not getting a clear idea of the composer's methods, which were quite new to him and which the poor provincial performance made still more difficult to grasp, D. borrowed the score, began by reading the words most attentively, studied the spirit, the psychology of each character, and, plunging next into the analysis of the music itself, followed in this way the road that would lead him to a real and complete comprehension of the opera in its entirety. From that time it was noticed that he was becoming more and more morose and taciturn, evading the questions put to him, or laughing with a sardonic air when he heard his comrades cry out in admiration. "Fools," he doubtless said to himself, "how can you understand such a work, you who admire *Les Prétendus*?"

Noticing the ironic expression on D.'s features, the players did not doubt that he would show himself as severe towards Spontini as he had shown himself towards Lemoine, and that he would bracket both composers in one and the same condemnation. The finale of the second act, however, having moved him to tears one day when the performance was a trifle less execrable than usual, they no longer knew what to think of him.

"He is mad," said some.

"He is acting," said others.

And all together: "He is a poor musician."

D., motionless in his chair, sunk in a deep reverie, furtively wiping his eyes, did not vouchsafe a word of reply to all these impertinences, but contempt and fury were accumulating in his heart. The incapacity of the orchestra, the even greater incompetence of the chorus, the lack of intelligence and feeling in the actors, the embellishments added to the music by the prima donna, the mutilation of all the phrases and rhythms, the insolent cuts—in a word, the tortures of all kinds he saw inflicted on the work that had become the object of his profound worship and every detail of which he knew—inflicted upon him a torture with which I am well acquainted, but which I am unable to describe. After the second act one evening, the whole house hav-

ing risen in enthusiasm, D. felt fury overwhelm him, and on an enraptured pittance's asking him this commonplace question: "Well, Monsieur Adolphe, what have you to say about it?" "I have to say," shouted D., pale with anger, "that you and all the others who are carrying on like lunatics in this theatre are fools, asses, brutes, worthy at most of Lemoine's music, since, instead of breaking the skulls of the director, the singers, and the musicians, you participate, by your applause, in the most shameful profanation with which genius can be branded."

This time the insult was too great; and in spite of the talent of the fiery artist as a performer—a talent which made him a valuable subject—the director, in spite of the fearful misery to which a dismissal would condemn him, was compelled, in order to avenge the public for this insult, to dispense with his services.

Contrary to those of men of his mould generally, D.'s tastes were not expensive. A few savings gleaned from his salary, and the lessons he had given up to the present time, assuring his existence for three months at least, deadened the blow of his dismissal and even made him look upon it as an event likely to exercise a favourable influence on his artistic career, by restoring him his freedom. But the principal charm of this unexpected deliverance came from the plan of a journey over which D. had ruminated ever since the genius of Spontini had been revealed to him. To hear *La Vestale* in Paris was the constant goal of his ambition. The moment of reaching it seemed to have arrived, when an incident that our enthusiast could not foresee threw an obstacle in his way. Born with a fiery temperament and unconquerable passions, Adolphe was nevertheless timid in the presence of women, and apart from a few anything but poetic love-affairs with the princesses of his theatre, mad love, all-devouring love, frantic love, the only love that could be the real one for him, had not yet opened a crater in his heart. On returning home one evening, he found the following note:

"Sir,

"Were it possible for you to devote a few hours to the musical education of a pupil who is already sufficiently advanced not to subject your patience to too severe trials, I should be glad if you would place them at my disposal. Your talents are known and

appreciated much more perhaps than you yourself suspect; so do not be surprised if, immediately on her arrival in your town, a Parisian woman hastens to entrust to you the direction of her studies in the beautiful art which you honour, and which you so well understand.

“Hortense N.”

This blending of flattery and conceit, the free and winning tone of the letter, stimulated the curiosity of D., and instead of answering it in writing he resolved to go and see the Parisian lady personally, to thank her for her trust in himself, to assure her that she did not in the least *surprise* him, and to inform her that, being on the point of leaving for Paris, he could not undertake the task, doubtless a most agreeable one, which she proposed to him. This little speech, repeated beforehand in the tone of irony appropriate to it, expired on the lips of the artist the moment he entered the sitting-room of the stranger. The original and captivating grace of Hortense, her elegant and select way of dressing, the something indefinable that is so fascinating in the gait and carriage and all the movements of a beauty of the Chaussée d'Antin, produced their full effect on Adolphe. Instead of being jocular, he was beginning to express, as to his approaching departure, the regrets of which the tone of his voice and the confusion reflected in his features betrayed the sincerity, when Madame N., like a clever woman, interrupted him:

“You are leaving, sir? Then I was well inspired not to let you go any time. Since you are going to Paris, let us begin our lessons during the few days remaining to you; immediately the season in your town is over, I am returning to the capital, where I shall be charmed to see you again and profit more freely by your suggestions.”

Adolphe, inwardly happy to see the reasons on which he had based his refusal so easily disposed of, promised to begin on the following morning and left the house in a dream. That day did not give a thought to *La Vestale*.

Madame N. was one of those *adorable* women (as they say at the Café de Paris, Tortoni's, and in three or four of the other sorts of dandyism) who, finding their slightest fancies *delicious* and *original*, think it would be tantamount to *murder* were they

to gratify them, and therefore profess a sort of respect for their own caprices, however absurd they may be.

"My dear Fr—" said one of these charming creatures to a celebrated dilettante a few years ago, "you know Rossini; tell him from me that his *Guillaume Tell* is a deadly thing; that it is enough to bore one to death; and that he must not *take into his head* to write a second opera in that style, otherwise Madame M. and I, who have afforded him such support, will abandon him to his fate."

On another occasion: "Who on earth is this new Polish pianist about whom artists are so crazy and whose music is so *queer*? I wish to see him; bring him along tomorrow."

"Madame, I will do my best, but I must confess that I am but slightly acquainted with the composer of those mazurkas, and that he is not mine to command."

"No, of course not; he is not at your command, but *he must obey mine*, so I count on his coming."

This strange invitation not having been accepted, the queen told her subjects that Mr. Chopin was an *odd sort of little body*, who played the piano passably, but that his music was merely an *eternal and most ridiculous logograph*.

A fancy of this kind was the sole motive of the somewhat impertinent note that Adolphe received from Madame N. just when he was preparing to leave for Paris. The beautiful Hortense was a most accomplished pianist and gifted with a magnificent voice, which she used to as much advantage as was possible, seeing there was no soul in it. She therefore stood in no need of the lessons of the Provençal artist, but the exclamations he had thrown in the public's face in the theatre had, as may well be imagined, resounded throughout the town. Our Parisian lady, hearing them talked about in all directions, asked and obtained particulars about the hero of the adventure, which appeared piquant to her. She too *was desirous of seeing him*, fully intending, after having examined the *odd sort of little body* at her leisure, discovered what he was made of, played with him as with a new instrument, to send him about his business for good. Matters turned out quite differently, however, to the vexation of the pretty *Simia parisiensis* (Parisian ape). Adolphe was very handsome. Great black eyes, full of flame, regular features, which a constant

pallor invested with a slight tinge of melancholy, but into which the warmest colour came at intervals, as enthusiasm or indignation quickened his pulses; a distinguished bearing, and manners differing considerably from those he might have been credited with, for he had seen almost nothing of the world except through the curtain-hole of his theatre; a character at once passionate and timid, with the most singular medley of stiffness and grace, patience and bluntness, sudden joviality and profound reverie, made him, because of all that was unexpected in him, the man most capable of ensnaring a coquette in her own net. That is just what happened, and yet without any premeditation on Adolphe's part, for he was smitten before she was. From the very first lesson the musical superiority of Madame N. revealed itself in all its splendour; instead of receiving advice, she almost went so far as to give it to her teacher. The sonatas of Steibelt, the Hummel of the day, the arias of Païsiello and Cimarosa, which she covered with embroideries that were sometimes audacious in their originality, afforded her the opportunity of making each facet of her talent scintillate in turn. Adolphe, to whom such a woman and so fine an execution were new things, soon fell completely under her charm.

After the grand fantasia of Steibelt (*L'Orage*), in which Hortense seemed to him mistress of all the powers of musical art, he said to her, trembling with emotion: "Madame, you were making fun of me in asking me to give you lessons; but how could I be vexed with you because of a mystification that has thrown open to me unawares the portals of the world of poetry, the paradise of my artist dreams, by transforming each of them into a brilliant reality? Continue to mystify me thus, madame, I implore you, tomorrow, the day after, every day, and I shall owe to you the most intoxicating joys it has ever been given me to know."

The intonation with which these words were spoken, the tears which welled up in his eyes, the nervous spasm which shook his frame, astonished Hortense much more than her talent had surprised the young artist. If the arpeggios, the turns, the pompous harmonies, the lace-like melodies, that sprang from the hands of the graceful fairy caused, so to speak, a sort of asphyxia of amazement in Adolphe, his impressionable nature, his lively sensibility

the picturesque expressions he used, even their very exaggeration, affected Hortense no less powerfully.

It was such a far cry from the impassioned approbation, the real joys of the artist, to the lukewarm and studied plaudits of the dandies of Paris that self-esteem alone would have been sufficient to make her look none too severely upon a man of less favoured outward appearance than our hero. Art and enthusiasm were face to face for the first time; the result of such a meeting was easy to foresee. . . . Adolphe, drunk with love, seeking neither to conceal nor to moderate the impulses of his altogether Southern passion, disconcerted Hortense completely, and thus unconsciously upset the plan of defence contemplated by the coquette. All this was so new to her! Although not actually feeling, for her part, anything like the devouring ardour of her lover, she nevertheless understood that here was a whole world of sensations (if not of sentiments) that the insipid liaisons she had previously indulged in had never revealed to her. They were thus happy, each in his own way, for a few weeks; the departure for Paris, as may well be imagined, was postponed indefinitely. Music was to Adolphe an echo of his profound happiness, the mirror in which were reflected the rays of his frenzied passion, whence they returned more scorching to his heart. To Hortense, on the contrary, music was but a recreation of which she had long since tired; it merely procured her some agreeable distractions, and the pleasure of shining in the eyes of her lover was often the sole motive capable of drawing her to the piano.

Entirely absorbed by his mad love, Adolphe, during the first days, had somewhat forgotten the fanaticism that had filled his life up to then. Although he was far from sharing the sometimes strange opinions of Madame N. respecting the merits of the various works that constituted her repertory, he nevertheless made extraordinary concessions to her, avoiding, without knowing why, the broaching in conversation of points of musical doctrine, concerning which a vague instinct warned him that there would have been too marked a divergence between them. Nothing less than some frightful blasphemy, such as the one that had caused him to show the door to one of his pupils, could have upset the equilibrium existing in Adolphe's heart between his violent love

and his despotic and impassioned artistic convictions. And this blasphemy was one day to escape Hortense's pretty lips.

It happened during a fine autumnal forenoon; Adolphe, reposing at the feet of his mistress, was revelling in the melancholy happiness, the delightful dejection, that follows great voluptuous crises. The atheist himself, in similar moments, hears rising within himself a hymn of gratitude towards the unknown cause that has brought about his death; a death "dreamy and calm as night," as Moore has beautifully expressed it, is in this instance the gift earnestly desired, the only one that our eyes, dimmed with celestial tears, allow us to catch a glimpse of, to crown that superhuman intoxication. Ordinary life, life devoid of poetry and love, *prose* life, in which one walks in lieu of flying, speaks instead of singing, in which so many flowers of brilliant hue lack perfume and grace, in which genius is worshipped and done glacial homage to for a single day only, in which art too frequently contracts unworthy alliances; life, in short, then presents itself under an aspect so gloomy, so empty, that death, were it stripped of the actual charm which a man drowned in happiness finds in it, would still be desirable in his eyes, by offering him an assured refuge from the insipid existence he above all things dreads.

Lost in thoughts of this kind, Adolphe was holding one of the delicate hands of his lady-love, imprinting on every finger slight nibbles, which he effaced with endless kisses, while Hortense with her free hand, humming the while, curled the black locks of her lover.

On hearing that voice so pure, so full of seduction, an irresistible temptation came to him unawares.

"Oh, sing me the elegy in *La Vestale*, my love; you know the one I mean:

*Toi que je laisse sur la terre,
Mortel que je n'ose nommer.*

Sung by you, that beautiful inspiration should attain a sublimity hitherto unheard of. I do not know why I have not yet asked this of you. Sing, sing Spontini to me; let me enjoy every happiness at one and the same time."

"What! Is that what you wish for?" replied Madame N., with

a tiny pout, which she thought charming. "You *like* that big monotonous lament? Heavens, how boresome it is! What a psalmody! Still, if you are bent on hearing it. . . ."

The cold blade of a dagger finding its way into the heart of Adolphe would not have lacerated it more cruelly than her words. Rising with a start like a man who discovers an unclean animal in the grass he has been sitting on, he at first riveted on Hortense eyes full of a gloomy and threatening fire; then, striding agitatedly about the room, his fists clenched, his teeth convulsively set, he seemed to be taking counsel with himself as to the manner in which he should reply and begin the breaking off of their intercourse, since to forgive such a remark was an impossibility. Admiration and love had fled; the angel had become an ordinary woman; the superior artist had fallen to the level of the ignorant and superficial amateurs who want art to *amuse them*, never having suspected that it has a more noble mission; Hortense was no longer anything but a graceful form lacking intelligence and soul; the musician had nimble fingers and a sonorous larynx . . . nothing more.

Nevertheless, in spite of the frightful torture that Adolphe felt at his discovery, in spite of the horror of so abrupt a disenchantment, it is not probable that he would have been lacking in consideration and tact when breaking off with a woman whose sole crime, after all, was to have an organization inferior to his own, and to love the *pretty* without understanding the *beautiful*. But as Hortense was incapable of crediting the violence of the storm she had just raised, the sudden contraction of Adolphe's features, his excited promenade about the sitting-room, his hardly contained indignation, seemed to her so comical that she was unable to resist a fit of insane merriment and suffered her lips to utter a strident peal of laughter. Have you ever noticed how odious a strident laugh can be in certain women? . . . To me it is the surest indication of a withered heart, egotism, coquetry. Just as the expression of keen joy is in some women stamped with charm and modesty, so does it assume with others a tone of indecent irony. The voice takes on a timbre that is incisive, impudent, and immodest, and all the more hateful the younger and prettier the woman is; in such an instance I can understand the delights of murder, and mechanically I feel for Othello's pillow.

Adolphe had doubtless the same feeling about the matter. Already he did not love Madame N. as he had done a moment ago, but he had pitied her for her limited faculties; he would have left her coldly, but without insulting her. The silly and noisy laugh she had emitted, at the very time when the unfortunate artist felt his heart rent, exasperated him. A flash of hatred and unutterable contempt suddenly gleamed in his eyes; wiping abruptly the cold perspiration from his brow, he said in a voice she had never heard from his lips before: "Madame, you are a silly creature."

The same evening he was on his way to Paris.

No one knows what were the thoughts of the modern Ariadne on finding herself thus forsaken. At all events the Bacchus who was to console her and heal the cruel wound inflicted on her self-esteem was probably not slow in making his appearance. Hortense was not the woman to remain inactive. *The activity of her mind and heart required nourishment.* This is the usual phrase by means of which such women poetize and seek to justify their most prosaic lapses from virtue.

However that may be, from the second day of his journey Adolphe, utterly disenchanted, was entirely wrapped up in the joy of seeing his favourite project, his obsession, on the point of becoming a reality. He was at last to be in Paris, in the centre of the musical world; he was about to hear the magnificent orchestra of the Paris Opéra, the large and sonorous chorus, and Madame Branchu in *La Vestale*. An article by Geoffroy,¹ which he read on reaching Lyons, increased his impatience still more. Contrary to the custom of the celebrated critic, he had given nothing but praise.

"Never," he wrote, "has Spontini's beautiful work been given with such a choral ensemble, nor with so passionate an inspiration by the principal artists. Madame Branchu, among others, soared to the highest degree of pathos; an expert songstress, gifted with an incomparable voice, a consummate tragedienne, she is perhaps the most precious acquisition on which the Opéra can have prided itself from the day of its foundation, this with all due deference to the partisans of Madame Saint-Huberti. Madame Branchu is, unfortunately, small in stature; but the naturalness of

¹ Julien-Louis Geoffroy, dramatic critic, the author of a famed *Cours de littérature dramatique* (1743-1814). (Translator's note.)

her attitudes, the energetic truth of her gestures, and the fire in her eyes cause this lack of stature to be unnoticed; in her discourse with the priests of Jupiter her acting is so grand that she seems to tower a full head above the colossal Dérivis. Last night a very long *entr'acte* preceded the third act. The reason for this unusual interruption in the performance was the violent state of excitement into which the part of Julia and Spontini's music had thrown the singer. In the prayer ('*O des infortunés*') her tremulous voice indicated already an emotion she could hardly control, but in the finale ('*De ces lieux, prêtresse adultère*'), her part, which is all pantomime, not compelling her so imperiously to restrain the transports that agitated her, tears inundated her cheeks, her gestures became disordered, incoherent, wild; and at the moment when the pontiff throws over her head the immense black veil that covers her like a shroud, instead of flying distracted, as she had always done up to now, Madame Branchu dropped fainting at the feet of the great vestal. The public, mistaking this for a new device of the actress, drowned in applause the peroration of this magnificent finale; chorus, orchestra, gong, Dérivis, all vanished under the shouts of the parterre. The house was wild with enthusiasm."

"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" exclaimed Richard III. Adolphe would have given the whole world to have been able to gallop away from Lyons then and there. He could hardly breathe while reading the foregoing lines; the arteries in his head were throbbing to the point of deafening him; he was in a state of fever. He was perforce compelled, however, to wait for the departure of the lumbering vehicle, so inappropriately styled a diligence, in which a seat had been reserved him for the next day. During the few hours he had still to spend in Lyons, Adolphe took good care not to enter any theatre. On any other occasion he would have been keen to do so; but, assured as he now was of soon hearing Spontini's masterpiece worthily performed, he wished to remain until then virginally pure of all contact with the provincial Muses. At last they were off. D., ensconced in a corner of the carriage, buried in thought, maintained an unsociable attitude, taking no part in the cackling of three ladies who were deeply engaged in keeping up a running conversation with a couple of soldiers. As usual, the conversation turned on every conceivable

subject; when the turn of music came, the thousand and one absurdities retailed hardly drew from Adolphe the laconic aside: "You lunatics!" The next day, however, he was compelled to answer the questions that the eldest of the women took into her head to ask him. All three of them losing patience at the persistent dumbness of the youthful traveller and at the sardonic smiles from time to time outlined on his features, they decided that he should speak and that they would learn the object of his journey.

"Doubtless Monsieur is going to Paris?"

"Yes, madame."

"To study law?"

"No, madame."

"Oh, Monsieur is a medical student?"

"You are mistaken, madame."

The interrogatory was this time at an end, but it was renewed on the following day with an importunity perfectly qualified to make the most enduring man lose patience.

"It may be that Monsieur is about to enter the École Polytechnique?"

"No, madame."

"Monsieur is in business, then?"

"Oh heavens, no, madame."

"Truly, nothing is more agreeable than to travel for one's pleasure, as Monsieur appears to be doing."

"If such was my object when starting, I believe, madame, that it will be difficult for me to attain it, if the future resembles the present at all."

This rejoinder, spoken in a dry tone, had the result of silencing the impertinent interrogator at last, and Adolphe could resume the course of his meditations. What was he to do on reaching Paris? . . . His whole fortune consisting of his violin and a purse of two hundred francs, to what means was he to have recourse to put to use the one and to economize the other? . . . Should he be able to make something out of his talent? . . . But after all was it worth while worrying about such things, or entertaining such fears for the future? . . . Was he not going to hear *La Vestale*? Was he not on the point of knowing to its fullest extent the happiness so long dreamt of? Were he to die after this immense enjoyment, what had he to complain of? . . . Was it not,

on the contrary, quite just that life should come to an end when the sum of joys that usually suffices for the whole duration of human existence is spent at a single stroke?

It was in this state of exaltation that our Provençal reached Paris. Hardly is he out of the carriage when he rushes to look at the bills; but what is this he sees on that of the Opéra? *Les Prétendus*! "An impudent hoax," he exclaimed; "it was hardly worth while getting myself expelled from my theatre, or flying from the music of Lemoine as from leprosy and the plague, to find it again at the Grand Opéra of Paris!" The fact is that this mongrel work, this model of the rococo, powdered, embroidered, gold-laced style, which seems to have been written exclusively for the Viscounts de Jodelet and the Marquises of Mascarille, was then in high favour. Lemoine alternately shared the Opéra's bills with Gluck and Spontini. In the eyes of Adolphe, the placing of these names cheek by jowl was a profanation; it seemed to him that a stage adorned by the finest geniuses of Europe should not be open to such pallid mediocrities; that the noble orchestra, still quivering under the virile tones of *Iphigénie en Tauride* or *Alceste*, should not be debased to the point of having to accompany the twitterings of Mondor and la Dandinière. He tried to drive from his mind a comparison between *La Vestale* and those wretched popular ditties; such an abomination curdled the blood of his veins. There still exist at the present time a few ardent or *extravagant* spirits (you may call them either) who view the matter from exactly the same standpoint.

Swallowing his disappointment, Adolphe was sadly returning home when fate willed that he should meet a compatriot to whom he had formerly given lessons on the violin. The latter, a wealthy amateur well known in musical circles, hastened to tell his former teacher all he knew about what was going on, and informed him that the performances of *La Vestale*, which had been suspended because of Madame Branchu's indisposition, would in all probability not be resumed for some weeks to come. Gluck's works themselves, although generally constituting the basis of the Opéra's repertory, were not produced during the first days of Adolphe's stay in Paris. This circumstance made it easier for him to fulfil the vow he had made of preserving his musical virginity for Spontini; he therefore did not set foot in any theatre and abstained

from every kind of music. Seeking a situation that would give him his daily bread without condemning him anew to the humiliating position he had so long occupied in the provinces, he played to Persuis, at that time conductor at the Opéra. Persuis discerned that he had talent, invited him to come and see him again, and promised him the first place that might become vacant among the violins of the Opéra. No longer feeling any anxiety about the future, and a couple of pupils whom his patron had found him facilitating his means of existence, the worshipper at Spontini's shrine felt his impatience to hear the magic score increase twofold. Every day he ran out to con the bills, only to have his expectations dashed to the ground. On the morning of the 22nd of March, on reaching the corner of the rue Richelieu just as the bill-poster was climbing up his ladder, Adolphe's eyes, after having seen in succession the placarding of the bills of the Vaudeville, the Opéra-Comique, the Théâtre-Italien, and the Porte-Saint-Martin, saw the slow deployment of a large brown sheet bearing as headline the words *Académie impériale de Musique*, and he nearly fell to the pavement on reading at last the name so greatly desired: *La Vestale*.

Hardly had Adolphe cast a look on the bill announcing *La Vestale* for the following day when a sort of delirium took possession of him. He rushed madly through the streets of Paris, coming into collision with the angles of houses, elbowing passers-by, laughing at their invectives, talking, singing, gesticulating like a madman escaped from the Charenton Asylum.

Dead with fatigue, bespattered with mud, he finally entered a café, ordered dinner, wolfed almost without knowing what he was doing the food the waiter had set before him, and lapsed into a strange fit of melancholy. A prey to a fear the cause of which he could not quite account for, in presence of the stupendous event about to come into his life, he listened awhile to the violent thumping of his heart, wept, and, letting his poor, lean head drop to the table, fell into a deep sleep. The following day was a calmer one; a call on Persuis shortened it. The latter, on seeing Adolphe, handed him a letter bearing the managerial stamp of the Opéra; it was his appointment as second violin. Adolphe thanked his patron, but without eagerness; this favour, which at any other time would have overwhelmed him with joy, was no longer in his eyes any-

thing more than an accessory of little interest; a few minutes later he did not give it a thought. He avoided speaking to Persuis of the performance about to take place that very evening; such a subject of conversation would have shaken him to the innermost strings of his heart; he dreaded it. Persuis, not knowing what to think of the strange look and incoherent speech of the young man, was about to ask him the cause of his trouble; noticing this, Adolphe rose and left. Strolling awhile in front of the Opéra, he cast fresh glances at the bills, to make sure that there was no change in the performance or in the names of the artists; this helped him to wait till the close of that endless day. Six o'clock struck at last. Twenty minutes later Adolphe was in his box, for in order to be less disturbed in his ecstatic admiration, and to enhance the solemnity of his happiness, he had taken, notwithstanding the folly of such an expenditure, an entire box for himself alone. We are going to let our enthusiast give us his own account of that memorable evening. A few lines that he wrote on reaching home, as a sequel to the sort of diary from which I have culled the foregoing particulars, show but too well the state of his soul and the inconceivable exaltation constituting the basis of his character; I give them to you here without any alteration.

"23 March, midnight

"And this is life! I contemplate it from the pinnacle of my happiness . . . it is impossible to go any further. . . . I have reached the summit. . . . To come down again? to go back? . . . Assuredly not, for I prefer making my exit before nauseating flavours poison the taste of the delicious fruit I have just plucked. What would my life be were I to prolong it?—that of the thousands of insects I hear buzzing about me. Chained once more to a music-stand, compelled to play alternately masterpieces and ignoble platitudes, I should end, like so many others, in becoming tired of it all; the exquisite sensitiveness that enables me to enjoy so many sensations and makes me accessible to so many sentiments unknown to the common herd would gradually become blunted; my enthusiasm would cool, if it had not become entirely extinguished under the ashes of habit. I might perhaps come to speak about geniuses as if they were ordinary beings; I might pronounce the names of Gluck and Spontini without raising my hat. I am well aware that I should always hate with all the force of my

soul that which I hate today; but is it not a cruel thing to preserve energy only for the purpose of hatred? Music fills too great a place in my existence. This passion has killed and absorbed all the others. My last experience of love disenchanted me only too cruelly. Should I ever find a woman whose organization would be tuned to the same high key as my own? No, I fear they are all more or less like Hortense. I had forgotten that name—Hortense—how a single word from her mouth disillusioned me! . . . Oh, the humiliation of having loved with the most ardent and poetic love, with all the might of heart and soul, a woman possessing neither, and radically incapable of understanding the meaning of the words *love, poetry!* . . . Silly, thrice-silly fool, of whom I still cannot think without the colour rushing to my face. . . .

"Yesterday I had the intention of writing to Spontini to beg him to let me call on him; but had my request been granted, the great man would never have believed me capable of understanding his work as I do understand it. I should in all probability appear to him merely an excited young man, childishly infatuated with a work a thousandfold beyond his grasp. He would think of me what he must necessarily think of the public. He might even attribute my outbursts of admiration to shamefully interested motives, thus confusing the most sincere enthusiasm with the meanest flattery. Horrible! . . . No, better make an end of it. I am alone in the world, an orphan from childhood; my death will not bring sorrow to a single person. A few will say: 'He was insane.' That will be my funeral oration. . . . I die the day after tomorrow. . . . *La Vestale* is to be performed again . . . let me but hear it a second time! . . . What a work! How love is pictured in it! . . . and fanaticism! All those mastiff-priests barking at their wretched victim. . . . What harmonies in that gigantic finale! What melody even in the recitatives! What an orchestra! It moves so majestically . . . the basses undulate like the waves of the ocean. The instruments are actors whose language is as expressive as that spoken on the stage. Dérivis was superb in his recitative in the second act; he was Jupiter Tonans. Madame Branchu, in the aria '*Impitoyables dieux!*' tore my heart out; I was near fainting. That woman is the incarnate genius of lyric tragedy; she would reconcile me to her sex. Yes! I shall see it once more . . . once . . . this *Vestale* . . . a superhuman production, which

could have been born only in a century of miracles like that of Napoleon. I shall concentrate into three hours all the vitality of twenty years of existence . . . and afterwards . . . I shall go . . . and ruminate over my happiness for all eternity."

Two days later, at ten o'clock at night, a report was heard at the corner of the rue Rameau, opposite the entrance to the Opéra. Gorgeously liveried servants rushed to the spot on hearing the noise, and raised the body of a man bathed in his blood; he showed no signs of life. At the very same moment a lady who was leaving the theatre, nearing the spot to find her carriage, recognized the blood-bespattered face of Adolphe, and exclaimed: "Oh, mercy! It is the unfortunate young man who followed me from Marseilles!" Hortense (for it was she) had there and then conceived the idea of turning to the advantage of her self-esteem the death of the man who had offended her by leaving her in so insulting a fashion. Next day the talk in the Club in the rue de Choiseul was: "That Madame N. is truly an enchanting woman! On her recent visit to the South a Provençal became so madly in love with her that he followed her right to Paris and blew out his brains at her feet last night, at the door of the Opéra. There's a success that will make her a hundred times more seductive."

Poor Alphonse! . . .

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"I'll be hanged," remarks Moran, "if Corsino, in depicting his Provençal, has not painted his own portrait!"

"That's what I was thinking a little while ago, when he was reading Adolphe's letter. You resemble him, my dear fellow," I say to Corsino.

Corsino looks at us in a strange way . . . lowers his eyes, and departs without replying.

THIRTEENTH EVENING

SPONTINI

A biographical sketch



FRENCH opéra comique is being given; it is very, etc.

All are talking. No one is playing, barring the faithful four—the four Catos—who are supported this evening by a side-drum. The hideous row the five of them make greatly hampers our conversation. Fortunately the side-drummer soon gets tired out, the player of the big drum is seized with a cramp in his right arm that makes all his ardour useless; and we are at last free to enjoy a chat.

“Do you believe in the reality of such fanaticism?” asks Dimsky of me, after having expressed his opinion of the story told the previous evening.

“I don’t believe in it, but I have often experienced it.”

“You have the answer you deserve, you lout,” says Corsino, who thereupon asks me: “Did you know Spontini?”

“Very well indeed, and out of the admiration with which his genius inspired me in the first place, there was born a deep personal affection for him.”

“It is said that his severity to his performers was beyond all belief.”

“In one respect you have been misinformed; I have often heard him compliment indifferent singers. He was, however, pitiless towards conductors, and nothing exasperated him more than to have his tempi misinterpreted. One day, in a town of Germany that I do not wish to name, he attended a performance of *Cortez*, under an incompetent conductor; in the middle of the second act the torture he was enduring became such that he had a fit of hysterics and had to be carried out.”

“Pray give us a biographical sketch of him. His life must have been full of excitement, and will teach more than one lesson.”

“I can refuse you nothing, gentlemen, but the life of this master, though certainly full of excitement, does not contain anything particularly romantic. You can judge for yourselves.”

On the 14th of November 1779 there was born at Majolati, near Jesi, in the March of Ancona, a child named Gasparo Spontini. I will not say of him what biographers tirelessly repeat when telling the lives of celebrated artists: "He showed at a very early hour extraordinary aptitudes for his art. When barely six years old he was producing remarkable works," etc., etc. No indeed, my admiration for his genius is too rational for me to resort to the commonplaces of vulgar praise. Moreover, everyone knows what the *masterpieces* of infant prodigies are, and how well it would have been, for the glory of those who subsequently became grown-up men, to have destroyed on the day of their appearance the ridiculous essays of their so greatly eulogized childhood. All that I know about the early years of Spontini, derived from his own lips, is limited to a few facts that I shall now repeat, without attaching to them any more importance than they are entitled to.

He was twelve or thirteen years of age when he went to Naples, for the purpose of entering the Conservatoire della Pietà. Was it at the desire of the child that the parents opened to him the portals of this famous school of music, or did his father, who certainly was not wealthy, believe that by giving him the opportunity of entering it he was putting in his way an easy and modest career; and was his intention merely that of making him choir-master of some monastery, or of some church of the second rank? I do not know. I incline towards the latter hypothesis, considering the disposition for the religious life shown by all the other members of the Spontini family. One of his brothers was the *curé* of a Roman village, the other (Anselmo Spontini) died, if I am not mistaken, a monk in a monastery in Venice a few years ago; his sister also ended her days in the convent in which she had taken the veil.

Whatever may be the truth of the matter, his studies at la Pietà were sufficiently fruitful to enable him to write, just about as well as anybody else, one of those trifles decorated in Italy, as elsewhere, with the pompous name of opera; it was entitled *I Puntigli delle donne*. I do not know whether this first attempt was performed or not. It however inspired its author with sufficient ambition and confidence in his powers to induce him to fly from the Conservatoire and go to Rome, where he hoped to have his theatre works more easily produced than in Naples. The fugitive

was soon recaptured and, under penalty of being taken back to Naples as a vagabond, ordered to justify his escapade and the expectations that had inspired him, by writing an opera for the Carnival. He was given a libretto entitled *Gli Amanti in cimento*, which he promptly set to music; it was almost immediately produced successfully. The public indulged in the transports customary to Romans on such occasions; besides, his age and the episode of his flight had predisposed the dilettanti in his favour. So Spontini was applauded, cheered, recalled, carried in triumph, and—forgotten at the end of a fortnight. This shortlived success at least brought him his freedom in the first place (he was dispensed from returning to the Conservatoire), and in the second place a somewhat advantageous engagement to go and, as they say in Italy, *write* in Venice.

So here he is, emancipated, left to himself after what does not appear to be a very long stay in the classes of the Naples Conservatoire. Here it is important to elucidate a question that quite naturally presents itself: Who was his teacher? . . . Some say Padre Martini, who was dead before Spontini entered the Conservatoire, nay, I think, even before he was born; others, one Baroni, whom he might have known in Rome; others again have attributed the honour of his musical education to Sala, Traetta, and even Cimarosa.

I was never inquisitive enough to interrogate Spontini on this subject and he never saw fit to mention it to me. But I have definitely gathered from his talk the practical admission that the real teachers of the composer of *La Vestale*, *Cortez*, and *Olympie* were the masterpieces of Gluck, with which he became acquainted for the first time on his arrival in Paris, in 1803, and which he at once studied passionately. As for the author of the numerous Italian operas whose nomenclature I shall give shortly, I do not think it a matter of any importance to know who the professor was who taught him the method of manufacturing them. The usages and customs of the Italian lyric theatres of his day are faithfully observed in them, and any one of the musicasters of his country could easily have supplied him with the formula which, even at that time, constituted the secret of the theatre. To confine myself to Spontini the Great, I think that not only Gluck, but also Méhul, who had already written his admirable *Euphrosine*, and Cherubini,

with his first French operas, must have developed in him the heretofore latent germ of his dramatic faculties and hastened their magnificent expansion.

On the other hand I do not find in his works any trace of an influence that might have been exercised over him, from a purely musical point of view, by the German masters, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The last-named was hardly known even by name in France when Spontini arrived there, while *La Vestale* and *Cortez* had already been successful on the boards of the Paris Opéra long before their author visited Germany for the first time. No, it was Spontini's instinct alone that guided him and made him suddenly discover in the use of vocal and instrumental masses, and the concatenation of modulations, so many riches unknown to or at least unexploited by his predecessors in opera. We shall soon see the result of his innovations, and the hatred they drew upon him from his compatriots, as well as from the French musicians.

Resuming the thread of my biographical narrative, I must confess my ignorance on the subject of the sayings and doings of the youthful Spontini in Italy, after the production of his third opera in Venice. I am not even sure of the theatres in which he produced the works succeeding this. They doubtless brought him as little money as they did glory, since he resolved to try his fortune in France, without being summoned thither by either the public voice or a powerful patron.

We know the titles of the thirteen or fourteen Italian scores composed by Spontini during the seven years following his first and ephemeral success in Rome. They are: *L'Amor segreto*, *L'Isola disabitata*, *L'Eroismo ridicolo*, *Teseo riconosciuto*, *La Finta Filosofa*, *La Fuga in maschera*, *I Quadri parlanti*, *Il Finto Pittore*, *Gli Elisi delusi*, *Il Geloso e l'Audace*, *Le Metamorfosi di Pasquale*, *Chi più guarda meno vede*, *La Principessa d'Amalfi*, and *Berenice*.

He preserved in his library the manuscripts and even the printed libretti of all these colourless works and occasionally showed them to his friends with a contemptuous smile, as playthings of his musical childhood.

On reaching Paris, Spontini had, I believe, a very hard time, and just contrived to make both ends meet by giving lessons. He succeeded in getting *La Finta Filosofa* produced at the Théâtre-

Italien; it met with favour. Whatever the majority of his biographers may say, there is good reason to believe that the opera of *Milton* (text by M. de Jouy) was Spontini's first attempt to set French words to music, and that this preceded the small and insignificant work entitled *Julie, ou le pot de fleurs*.

And indeed from the title-pages of these two engraved scores we learn that *Milton* was performed at the Opéra-Comique on the 27th of November 1804, while *Julie* was not presented at the same theatre until the 12th of March 1805. *Milton* was quite well received. *Julie*, however, died under the weight of public indifference, just like a thousand other productions of the same kind, which are born and die the same day without anyone's condescending to notice them. One number from it has been preserved by the light-comedy theatres; it is the aria "*Il a donc fallu pour la gloire.*" The celebrated artist Elleviou had taken Spontini to his heart; wishing to give him an opportunity of doing better, he procured for him an opéra-comique libretto in three acts: *La Petite Maison*, which most probably was no better than *Julie*, and which the imprudent musician was weak enough to accept. *La Petite Maison* came to the ground so completely and with such a crash that not a vestige of it has remained. The performance could not even be carried to an end. Elleviou had an important part in it; indignant at a few isolated hisses, he so far forgot himself as to put his fingers to his nose. A fearful row ensued, the pit invaded the orchestra, drove out the musicians, and smashed everything it could lay its hands on.

Following this double reverse of the young composer, every door was about to be closed to him, but there remained to him a high patronage, that of the Empress Josephine; she did not fail him, and it is certainly to her alone that the genius of Spontini, which was being extinguished before its dawn, was able, two years later, to make its radiant ascension to the heaven of art. M. de Jouy had had for a long time in his portfolio a grand-opera libretto, *La Vestale*, that had been refused by both Méhul and Cherubini. Spontini begged it so pressingly of him that the author finally decided to entrust him with it.

Spontini, poor at the time, already decried and hated by the rabble of Parisian musicians, forgot all else and swooped like an eagle on his rich prey. He shut himself up in a wretched lodging,

neglected his pupils, and, indifferent to the primary necessities of life, plunged into his work with the feverish ardour, the trembling passion, that were the sure signs of the first eruption of the musical volcano in him.

The score being completed, the Empress had it immediately put in rehearsal at the Opéra, and it was then that there began for Josephine's protégé the torture of rehearsals—a frightful agony for an innovator as yet without authority, and towards whom the whole staff of executants was naturally and systematically hostile; a continuous struggle against malevolent intentions; heart-rending attempts to alter ancient boundaries, to put heat into icicles, to reason with fools, to speak of love to the envious and of courage to cowards. All were up in arms against the alleged difficulties in the new work, the novel forms of this grand style, the impetuous movements of this incandescent passion lit up by the purest rays of Italy's sun. Each one wished to shorten something, to cut, prune, flatten out this proud music, which required so much of them and tired its interpreters out by constantly demanding of them attention, vigour, and scrupulous fidelity. Madame Branchu herself, the inspired woman who created in so admirable a fashion the part of Julia, confessed to me later, not without regret over her culpable discouragement, having told Spontini one day that she would never be able to learn to sing his *unsingable recitatives*. The recastings of the instrumentation, the suppressions and restorations of phrases, the transpositions, had already caused the Opéra enormous expenses for copying. Without the indefatigable kindness of Josephine and the *will* of Napoleon, who insisted that the *impossible* should be done, it is beyond doubt that the score of *La Vestale*, rejected as absurd and impossible of performance, would never have seen the day. But while the poor great artist writhed under the tortures inflicted on him with such cruel persistence at the Opéra, the Conservatoire was melting the lead that, on the great day of the performance, it itself meant to pour into his live wounds. The whole swarm of contrapuntist brats of students, swearing, on the dictum of their professors, that Spontini was ignorant of the first elements of harmony, that his melody lay on the accompaniment like a handful of hair on a soup (for over ten years I have heard this noble comparison applied to the works of Spontini in the classes of the Conservatoire), all these

young weavers of notes, who were about as capable of understanding and feeling the great things of music as the hall-porters, their fathers, were of judging literature and philosophy, leagued together for the purpose of encompassing *La Vestale's* downfall. The hissing system was not to be resorted to. That of yawns and laughter having been resolved upon, each of these little ruffians was to don a night-cap at the close of the second act and pretend to go to sleep.

I got this information from the leader of the gang of sleepers himself. He had chosen as his assistant organizer of sleep a young ballad-singer, who later on became one of our most celebrated composers of comic operas. Nevertheless, the first act was got through without hindrance, and the cabal, compelled to admit the effect of this beautiful music—so badly written, if they were to be believed—contented themselves with saying, with naïve astonishment, in which there was no longer any trace of hostility: "It goes!" Twenty-two years later, Boïeldieu, when attending the final rehearsal of Beethoven's Symphony in C minor, was also to say with the same sentiment of surprise: "It goes!" The Scherzo had seemed to him so *oddly written* that in his opinion *it could not go!* Alas! there are many other things that have gone, are still going, and will continue to go, in spite of the professors of counterpoint and the composers of comic operas.

When the second act of *La Vestale* came, the cumulative interest of the temple scene did not allow the conspirators to dream for a single moment of carrying out the wretched farce they had planned, while the finale drew from them, just as it did from the impartial public, ardent applause, for which they no doubt had to do penance the next day, by continuing, in their classes, to run down the ignorant Italian who had all the same moved them so deeply. Time is a great teacher! The saying is not a new one, but the revolution that has come about during these twelve or fifteen years in the ideas of our Conservatoire constitutes a striking demonstration of its truth. There hardly exists in that institution nowadays any prejudice against, or foregone conclusions hostile to, anything new; the spirit of the school is excellent. I believe that the Society of Concerts, by familiarizing young musicians with a number of masterpieces by great composers whose bold and independent genius never knew anything of our scholastic dreams, is

to a large extent responsible for this result. Hence it is that the performances of fragments of *La Vestale* by the Society of Concerts and the pupils of the Conservatoire are always a huge success, a success of plaudits, exclamations, and tears, which upset the executants and the public to such an extent that it is sometimes impossible to continue the concert for a whole half-hour. One day, in circumstances of this kind, Spontini, concealed at the back of a box, was philosophically watching this tempest of enthusiasm, doubtless asking himself, in face of the tumultuous manifestations of the orchestra and the chorus, what had become of all those petty scamps, little contrapuntists, and small blockheads of the year 1807, when the parterre, having descried him, rose as one man and turned towards him, and the house once more resounded with shouts of gratitude and admiration. Sublime is the clamour with which deeply moved souls salute true genius, whose most noble recompense it is! Is there not something providential in this ovation awarded the great artist in the very bosom of the school where, for over thirty years, hatred of his person and contempt for his work were inculcated?

And yet how greatly does the music of *La Vestale* lose when deprived of the prestige of the stage, especially for those hearers (and their number is great) who have never heard it at the Opéra! How is it possible at a concert to divine the multitude of effects of all kinds in which the dramatic inspiration manifests itself so abundantly and so profoundly? What these hearers may grasp is a truth of expression which is divined in the opening bars of each role, the intensity of the passion that makes this music luminous from the ardent flame concentrated in it—*sunt lacrymæ rerum*—and the purely musical value of the melodies and groups of harmonies. But there are ideas that cannot make themselves manifest except in a stage performance; there is one, among others, of rare beauty in the second act. It is this: in Julia's aria "*Impitoyables dieux!*" an aria in the minor key and full of a despairing agitation, is a phrase heart-rending in its abandon and painful tenderness: "*Que le bienfait de sa présence enchante un seul moment ces lieux.*" After the finish of the aria and the words in recitative, "*Viens, mortel adoré, je te donne ma vie,*" while Julia goes up-stage to open the door to Licinius, the orchestra takes up again a fragment of the preceding aria, in which the

accents of the impassioned trouble of the vestal still predominate; but at the very moment when the door opens and lets in the friendly rays of the moon, the phrase "*Que le bienfait de sa présence*" re-enters *pianissimo* in the orchestra, this time with a little decoration in the wind; it is as if a delicious atmosphere pervades the temple, an exhalation of the perfume of love, the blossoming of the flower of life, the opening of heaven's gates; and one conceives that Licinius' love, discouraged by her struggle with her heart, totters to the altar steps, where she sinks to the ground, prepared to give her life for a moment of love's intoxication. I have never been able to witness that scene without being moved by it to the point of vertigo. From that point on, nevertheless, the musical and dramatic interest increases steadily; it may almost be said that, as a whole, the second act of *La Vestale* is just one gigantic crescendo, the *forte* of which does not come till the final veil scene. You will not expect me, gentlemen, to analyse here the beauties of the immortal score, which you admire as much as I do. But how can I help pointing out, by the way, such marvels of expression as are found at the beginning of the lovers' duet:

LICINIUS

Je te vois.

JULIA

En quels lieux!

LICINIUS

Le dieu qui nous rassemble

Veille autour de ces murs et prend soins de nos jours.

JULIA

Je ne crains que pour toi!

What a difference between the accents of these two characters! The words of Licinius come hurriedly from his burning lips; Julia, on the other hand, has now hardly any inflexions in her voice, her strength is failing her, she is dying. The character of Licinius is still better developed in his cavatina, the melodic beauty of which cannot be too much admired; at first he is tender, then he consoles, he worships, but towards the end, at the words:

Va, c'est aux dieux à nous porter envie,

a kind of pride betrays itself in his accents, he contemplates his lovely conquest, the joy of possession becomes greater than happiness itself, and his passion is tinged with pride. As regards the duet, more especially at the peroration of the ensemble:

*C'est pour toi seul que je veux vivre!
Oui, pour toi seule je veux vivre!*

there are things that cannot be described—heart-throbs, cries, distracted embraces unknown to you, pale lovers of the North; it is Italian love in its furious grandeur and its volcanic ardour. In the finale, on the entry of the people and priests into the temple, the rhythmic forms grow beyond measure; the orchestra, storm-swept, swells and undulates with a terrible majesty; religious fanaticism is here the moving force.

*Ô crime, ô désespoir! ô comble de revers!
Le feu céleste éteint! la prêtresse expirante!
Les dieux pour signaler leur colère éclatante,
Vont-ils dans le chaos replonger l'univers?*

This recitative is terrifyingly realistic in its melodic development, its modulations, its instrumentation; it is of a monumental grandeur; everywhere in it is made manifest the threatening power of a priest of Jupiter Tonans. And among the phrases of Julia, successively full of discouragement, resignation, revolt, and daring, there are accents so natural that it seems as if no others could have been employed, and yet so rare that the finest scores hardly contain any of them. Such are:

*Eh quoi, je vis encore! . . .
Qu'on me mène à la mort! . . .
Le trépas m'affranchit de ton autorité. . . .
Prêtres de Jupiter, je confesse que j'aime. . . .
Est-ce assez d'une loi pour vaincre la nature! . . .
Vous ne le saurez pas. . . .*

At this last answer of Julia to the question of the pontiff, the thunderbolts of the orchestra burst with a crash; we feel that she

is lost, that the touching prayer the unhappy one has just addressed to Latona will not save her. The measured recitative "*Le temps finit pour moi*" is a masterpiece of modulation, considering what precedes and what follows. The high priest has ended his phrase in the tone of E major, which will soon become that of the final chorus. The song of the vestal, moving gradually further and further from that tonality, is about to settle on the dominant of C minor when the altos begin alone a sort of tremolo on the B, which the ear takes for the leading note of the key lately established, and, by means of this same B, which is suddenly to become once more the dominant, lead into an explosion of the brass and kettledrums in the key of E major, which vibrates anew with redoubled sonorousness, like those lights that by night seem more dazzling when we see them again after some obstacle has for a moment hidden them from our sight. As for the anathema with which the pontiff now overwhelms his victim, and the *stretta*, any description would be as impotent as useless for one who has not heard them. Here especially we recognize the might of the Spontini orchestra, which, in spite of the varied developments of modern instrumentation, remains a standing monument, majestic, beautiful in its form, draped *à l'antique*, and as brilliant as on the day when it sprang fully armed from the brain of its author. The heart throbs with pain under the incessant repercussions of the pitiless rhythm of the double syllabic chorus of the priests, in contrast with the moaning melody of the weeping vestals. But the divine anguish of the hearer does not attain its highest pitch until the place where, abandoning the precipitate rhythm, instruments and voices, the former in sustained tones, the latter in tremolo, pour out in steady torrents the strident harmonies of the peroration; this is the culminating point of this crescendo that has been working up steadily during the whole of the second half of the second act, and which, in my opinion, is beyond comparison with any other in its immensity and the formidable slowness of its progress. During the great performances of this Olympian scene at the Conservatoire and at the Paris Opéra, everyone and everything shudders—the public, the performers, the building itself, which, metallized from basement to dome, seems a colossal gong emitting sinister vibrations. The means at the disposal of small thea-

res like your own, gentlemen, are insufficient to produce this strange phenomenon.

Now I should like you to notice, in regard to the arrangement of the men's voices in this incomparable *stretta*, that far from being a *clumsy blunder* and a *poor thing*, as has been alleged, the parcelling out of the vocal forces has been deeply calculated. The tenors and the basses are at the outset divided into six parts, of which three only are heard at a time; it is a double choir in dialogue. The first chorus sings three notes that are immediately repeated by the second, thus producing a continuous repercussion of each beat of the bar, more than one-half of the men's voices therefore never being employed at a time. It is only when the *fortissimo* is approaching that the entire mass is fused into a single chorus; this is at the moment when, the melodic interest and the impassioned expression having attained their highest strength, the panting rhythm has need of new forces to launch the heart-rending harmonies accompanying the song of the women. This is the consequence of the vast system of crescendo adopted by the composer, the extreme term of which is to be found, as I have already said, in the dissonant harmony that breaks out when the pontiff throws the fatal black veil over Julia's head. It is an admirable combination, whatever may have been said about it, one which cannot be praised too highly, and only a half-of-a-quarter musician, like the one who censured it, could fail to recognize its value. But it is natural for the criticism that is directed from below above to blame the exceptional men whom it permits itself to take to task for the very qualities that make them what they are, and to see weakness in the most evident manifestation of their knowledge and strength.

When will come the time for the Paganinis of the art of writing music no longer to be compelled to take lessons from the blind beggars who squat on the Pont-Neuf? . . .

The success of *La Vestale* was striking and complete. One hundred performances were insufficient to damp the enthusiasm of the Parisians; *La Vestale* was given, more or less well, in all the provincial theatres; it was produced in Germany; it even held the boards for a whole season at the San Carlo, Naples, where Madame Colbran, who later on was to become Madame Rossini,

took the part of Julia. The composer did not hear of this success until long afterwards; it caused him profound joy.

This masterpiece, so admired throughout France for twenty-five years, would almost be a stranger to the present musical generation were it not for the big concerts that bring it into the light of day from time to time. The theatres have not retained it in their repertory; this is a boon over which Spontini's admirers should congratulate themselves. Its execution requires, indeed, qualities that are daily becoming more rare. It imperiously demands great voices trained in the grand style, singers—more especially the women—gifted with something besides talent; to give works of this kind appropriately requires choruses that know how to sing and act, a big orchestra, a leader of great ability to conduct and animate it, and, above all, the whole company must be imbued with the sentiment of expression, a sentiment almost extinct nowadays in Europe, where the most enormous absurdities gain popularity in an amazing fashion, where the most trivial and more especially the falsest style is the one that has the greatest chance of success in the theatre. Hence the extreme difficulty of finding for these models of art both audiences and worthy interpreters. The brutishness of the majority of the public, its lack of understanding in matters of imagination and the heart, its love of brilliant platitudes, the baseness of all its melodic and rhythmic instincts, have naturally driven artists on to the road they now follow. It would seem to the most ordinary common sense that the public taste should be formed by the artists, but unhappily it is the taste of the artists that is deformed and corrupted by the public.

It is no argument in its favour that from time to time it takes some fine work to its bosom and conducts it to triumph. This merely proves—although the *tiniest millet-seed* would be more appropriate to the purpose—that it has unwittingly swallowed a pearl and that its palate is still less delicate than that of the cock of the fable, who did not make such a mistake. Otherwise, indeed, if it is because they are beautiful that the public has applauded certain works, it should, for the contrary reason, have manifested a violent indignation on other occasions and have demanded a strict account of their works from the men who have so often publicly slapped the faces of art and of common sense. But it is

far from having done this. Some circumstance foreign to the merit of the work was therefore the cause of its success; some sonorous plaything has amused these overgrown children, or a performance alluring by its verve or its unaccustomed luxury has fascinated them. For in Paris, at least, by taking the public unawares before it has had time to have an opinion manufactured for it, it is possible to make it swallow anything by means of a performance exceptional *in the brilliancy of its surface qualities*.

It is now conceivable that we should congratulate ourselves that the French theatres neglect monumental scores as they do, since, the obliteration of the sensibility of the public being patent and proved as it is, there remain no chances of success for such miracles of expressiveness as *La Vestale* and *Cortez* except by means of a performance impossible to obtain nowadays.

At the time when Spontini came to France, the art of ornate singing among the women was no doubt not so advanced as it is today, but assuredly broad, dramatic, impassioned singing existed free from all alloy; it was to be found, at any rate, at the Opéra. There was then a Julia, an Armide, an Iphigénie, an Alceste, a Hypermnestre. There was Madame Branchu, the very type of those soprano voices, full and resonant, gentle and powerful, that are capable of dominating the whole orchestra and yet able to sink to the feeblest murmur of timid passion, fear, or reverie. No one has ever taken her place. One had long forgotten the admirable manner in which she declaimed her recitatives and sang the slow and mournful melodies, when Duprez, at the time of his début in *Guillaume Tell*, revived memories of the power of that art in its high perfection. But Madame Branchu added to these eminent qualities those of an irresistible impetuosity in scenes of transport, and an ease of production that never forced her to slacken the pace of a passage without good cause, or to add beats to a bar, as is done continually nowadays. Moreover, Madame Branchu was a tragic actress of the highest order, a quality indispensable for playing the great female parts in Gluck and Spontini; she had animation and a genuine sensibility, and so was never compelled to resort to artifice to imitate these. I did not see her in the role of Julia, which was written for her; at the time when I heard her at the Opéra, she had already given up playing it. But what she showed herself to be in *Alceste*, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, the *Danaïdes*,

and *Olympie* enabled me to judge what she must have been in *La Vestale* fifteen years earlier. Spontini was further fortunate enough, when staging his work, to find an actor out of the common for the part of the high priest; it was the elder Dérivis, with his tremendous voice, his high stature, his dramatic diction, his appropriate and majestic gestures. He was young at the time, and practically unknown. The part of the pontiff had been assigned to another actor, who did very badly in it and who naturally grumbled ceaselessly, at the rehearsals, about the alleged difficulties of this music that he could not understand. One day when his incompetence and impertinence were displaying themselves more openly than usual, the indignant Spontini snatched the part from him and threw it into the fire. Dérivis was present; he rushed to the fireplace, plunged his hand into the flames, and rescued the part, exclaiming: "I have saved it! I keep it." "It is yours," replied the composer, "and you will, I am sure, be worthy of it." The prognostication came true; indeed, the part was one of the best creations of Dérivis, nay, doubtless the only one that allowed the inflexibility of his rough voice to assert itself without disadvantage.

This score is, in my opinion, in a style entirely different from the one that had been adopted in France by the composers of that period. Neither Méhul, Cherubini, Berton, nor Lesueur wrote thus. It has been said that Spontini proceeded from Gluck. As regards dramatic inspiration, character delineation, truth, and vehemence of expression, this is true. But as regards his melodic and harmonic style, his scoring and his colour, he proceeds from himself alone. His music has a particular physiognomy it is impossible to mistake; a few harmonic negligences (they are very rare) have been made the pretext for a thousand ridiculous charges of incorrectness formerly thundered against it by the professors, charges based still more on the new and beautiful harmonies that the great master had discovered and used felicitously, long before the dominies of the day had even dreamt they existed or had found the reason for their existence. That was his great crime. But did he even know that it was a crime to write chords and modulations that usage had not yet popularized, and before the learned doctors had decided whether it was permissible to use them? . . . Truth to tell, there was another reason for this

revolt of the Conservatoire. If one excepts Lesueur, whose opera *Les Bardes* enjoyed a number of brilliant performances, none of the composers of the period had met with any success at the Opéra. The *Jérusalem*, the *Triomphe de Trajan* of Persuis enjoyed the sort of transient success that does not count in the history of art, attributable to the splendour of the staging and to resemblances that the political circumstances of the time permitted to be established between the heroes of the works and the hero of the immense drama that was making the entire world palpitate. The grand repertory of the Opéra was therefore for a long run of years sustained almost exclusively by the two operas of Spontini (*La Vestale* and *Cortez*) and by Gluck's five scores. The ancient glory of the German composer had no other rival on our leading lyric stage than the young glory of the Italian master. Such was the motive of the hatred borne him by the school at the back of which were the musicians whose own attempts to reign at the Opéra had been unsuccessful.

It would never have been possible, it was said, to produce *La Vestale* without the corrections that learned men had been good enough to make in that monstrous score so as to render it "performable"! etc., etc. Hence the laughable pretensions of a host of people to the merit of having retouched, corrected, refined the work of Spontini. Personally I know four composers who are reputed to have put their hand to it. No sooner was the success of *La Vestale* fully assured, irresistible, unquestionable, than these people went even further. It was no longer a matter of corrections only; this one claimed to have written the duet in the second act, another the funeral march in the third, and so on. It is rather odd that in the considerable number of duets and marches written by these illustrious masters it is impossible to find pieces of that order or that height of inspiration! . . . Can these gentlemen have carried their devotion to the point of making Spontini a present of their finest ideas? Such abnegation passes the boundaries of the sublime! The final version of the story accepted for a long time in the musical limbos of France and Italy was this: Spontini was not the author of *La Vestale* at all. This work, written contrary to all sense, corrected and revised by everybody, against which scholastic and academic anathemas had been unceasingly hurled for so long, this crude and confused work, Spontini could

not have produced it; he had bought it ready-made *at a grocer's*; it came from the pen of a *German* composer, who had died of want in Paris; all that Spontini had had to do was to *arrange* the melodies of this unfortunate musician to the words of M. de Jouy and add a few bars to join up the scenes. It must be admitted that he has arranged them skilfully, for one could swear that each note had been written for the word to which it is set. Even M. Castil-Blaze himself did not go as far as that! In vain was it sometimes asked at which grocer's he had later on purchased the score of *Fernand Cortez*, which, we all know, is not without merit; no one has ever been able to find out. How many there are, however, to whom the address of this precious shopkeeper would have been a valuable bit of information, and who would have rushed to his shop and laid in a stock! He must assuredly be the same who sold Gluck his score of *Orphée*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau his *Devin du village*. (The authorship of these two works, of such disproportionate merit, has been similarly denied to their composers.)

But a truce to this incredible nonsense; we are all aware that envious fury can produce, in the unfortunate wretches it fastens on, a state verging on imbecility.

Master of a position so rancorously contested, and knowing his strength at last, Spontini prepared to undertake another composition in the antique style. It was to be an *Electra*; but the Emperor caused him to be informed that he would be pleased to see him take as the subject of his new work the conquest of Mexico by Fernando Cortez. It was a command the composer hastened to obey. None the less, the tragedy of *Electra* had made a deep impression on him; to set it to music was one of his dearest aspirations, and I have often heard him express regret at having had to give it up.

At the same time, I believe that the selection of the Emperor was a fortunate one for the author of *La Vestale*, in that it diverted him from composing a second time in the antique style and compelled him on the contrary to discover, for scenes just as moving, but more varied and less solemn, the strange and charming colour, the proud and tender expression, and the happy audacities that make the score of *Cortez* the worthy rival of its elder sister. The success of the new opera was triumphal. From that day

Spontini remained the master of our first lyric theatre, and he must, like his hero, have exclaimed:

Cette terre est à moi, je ne la quitte plus!

I have often been asked which of the first two great operas of Spontini I prefer, and I must confess that I have never been able to answer the question. *Cortez* resembles *La Vestale* only in the unvarying truth and beauty of its expression. As to the other qualities of its style, they are entirely different from those of its elder sister. But the scene of the mutiny of the soldiers in *Cortez* is one of those miracles practically undiscoverable in the thousand operas written up to the present time, a miracle of which the finale of the second act of *La Vestale* can alone, I fear, be the counterpart. In *Cortez* all is energetic, imperious, brilliant, impassioned, and graceful; its inspiration burns and overflows, yet is governed by reason. All the characters are incontestably true. Amazily is tender and devoted; Cortez hot-tempered and fiery, but with tender moments; Telasco gloomy, but noble in his savage patriotism. There is the beat of powerful wings such as eagles alone possess, a sequence of lightning-flashes sufficient to illumine an entire world.

Oh! Let no one speak to me of *painful labours*, of alleged *harmonic incorrectnesses*, or of the faults still imputed to Spontini, since, were they even true, the effect produced by his work, my emotion and that of a thousand other musicians whom it is not easy to dazzle, are none the less true in their turn. If it be added that in our exaltation we have lost the faculty of reasoning, that is the greatest praise that can be conferred on this music. Upon my soul, I should like to see all those who deny the superiority of such a power try their hands at it! Come, I would say to them, you apparently do not insist that musical and dramatic composition should have as its sole object that of *speaking to the reason* of the hearers, and should leave them absolutely calm and cool in their methodical contemplation? Well, then, since you grant that art can also, without debasing itself too much, tend to produce in certain organizations the emotions they prefer, here is a large and well-trained choir, an excellent orchestra, singers selected from the best, a poem strewn with striking situations, lines well adapted for the music; come now, get to work! Try

to move us, try to make us, as you put it, lose our reasoning faculty; it will be, according to you, an easy matter, since after an act of *Cortez* you find us in this state of fever and palpitation. Do not hesitate, we give our defenceless selves up to you; take advantage of our impressionability; we shall bring smelling-salts, and there will be physicians in the house to decide the point to which musical intoxication can be carried without danger to human life.

Alas, poor folks, we should soon prove to you, I fear, that your efforts are in vain, that reason remains with us, and that our hand does not tremble as it goes over the whole of your work with a scalpel to establish the fact that it has no heart. . . .

After one of the last performances of *Cortez* in Paris I wrote to Spontini the following letter, which, when he read it, caused him to emerge a little from the seeming coldness that was habitual with him:

"Dear Master,

"Your work is noble and beautiful, and it is perhaps today the *duty* of artists able to appreciate its magnificence to repeat this to you. Whatever your troubles may be at the present time, the consciousness of your genius and of the incalculable value of its creations will easily make you forget them.

"You have provoked violent hatreds, and because of these some of your admirers seem afraid to confess their admiration. They are cowards! I prefer your enemies.

"*Cortez* was given at the Opéra yesterday. Still shattered by the terrible effect of the mutiny scene, I wish to cry out to you: Glory! Glory to, and respect for, the man whose powerful intellect, warmed by his heart, has created this immortal scene! Has ever indignation found such accents in any work of art? Was ever martial enthusiasm more ardent and poetic? Have *daring* and *will*, those proud daughters of genius, been anywhere set in so full a light and pictured in such colours? No, and no one believes it.

"It is beautiful, it is true, it is new, it is sublime! Were music not left to the tender mercies of public charity, there would exist somewhere in Europe a theatre, a lyric pantheon, exclusively consecrated to the production of monumental masterpieces, where at long intervals they would be given by *artists* with the care and the

pomp due to them, and listened to on the solemn festal days of art by audiences of sensitiveness and intelligence.

"But almost everywhere music, bereft of the prerogatives of its noble origin, is merely a foundling whom, so it seems, it is sought to drive to prostitution.

"Adieu, beloved master; there exists the religion of the beautiful, which is the one I profess; and if it is a duty to admire great things and honour great men, I feel, as I press your hand, that it is also a joy."

It was a year after the appearance of *Fernand Cortez* that Spontini was appointed director of the Théâtre-Italien. He had gathered together an excellent company, and it is due to him that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was heard in Paris for the first time. The parts were allotted as follows: Don Giovanni, Tacchinardi; Leporello, Barilli; Masetto, Porto; Ottavio, Crivelli; Donna Anna, Madame Festa; Zerlina, Madame Barilli.

Nevertheless, in spite of the distinguished services that Spontini was rendering to art in his management of the Théâtre-Italien, a rather low intrigue soon compelled him to relinquish his post. Furthermore Paer, who was at that time managing the little Italian Court theatre and who was anything but pleased with the success of his rival on the huge stage of the Opéra, affected to belittle him, styled him a renegade, called him, by way of gallicizing him, M. *Spontin*, and on many occasions made him fall into the traps that Signor Astucio, we all know, was so adept in setting.

Having recovered his freedom, Spontini wrote an opera *d'occasion*, *Pélage, ou le Roi de la Paix*, now forgotten, and followed this by *Les Dieux rivaux*, an opera-ballet, in partnership with Persuis, Berton, and Kreutzer. When *Les Danaïdes* was revived, Salieri, who was too old to leave Vienna, entrusted him with the task of directing the rehearsals of his work, authorizing him to make such changes and additions as he might consider necessary. Spontini confined himself to touching up, in his fellow-countryman's score, the end of Hypermnestre's aria "*Par les larmes dont votre fille*," by adding to it a coda full of dramatic spirit. But he composed for it several delightful dance tunes, and a bacchanal that will remain as a model of liveliness and ardour, and the standard expression of gloomy and dishevelled joy.

These works were succeeded by the composition of *Olympie*, a grand opera in three acts. Neither on the occasion of its first production nor on that of its revival in 1827 did it meet with the success to which, in my opinion, it was entitled. Various causes united by mere chance to check its upward career. Even political ideas took up arms against it. The Abbé Grégoire was just then in everybody's thoughts. People thought they could detect a pre-meditated intention of alluding to the famous regicide in the scene of *Olympie* wherein Statira exclaims:

*Je dénonce à la terre
Et voue à sa colère
L'assassin de son roi.*

Henceforth the entire liberal party showed itself hostile to the new work. The assassination of the Duc de Berri having led to the closing of the theatre in the rue Richelieu shortly afterwards, the run of the work was of necessity interrupted and the final blow given to a success not firmly established as yet, the public attention being wrenched away violently from matters of art. When, eight years later, *Olympie* saw the boards once more, Spontini, who had been appointed in the interval musical director to the King of Prussia, found on his return from Berlin a pronounced change in the ideas and the taste of the Parisians. Rossini, powerfully supported by M. de la Rochefoucauld and the whole directorate of the Beaux-Arts, had just arrived from Italy. The sect of the pure dilettanti went delirious at the mere name of the author of the *Barbiere* and heartily abused all other composers. The music of *Olympie* was styled plain-song. M. de la Rochefoucauld refused to prolong for a few weeks Madame Branchu's stay at the Opéra; and as she alone could sustain the part of Statira, which she played only at the first production for her retiring-benefit performance, that was the end of the matter. Spontini, whose soul was ulcerated by further hostile acts, which it would take too long to enumerate here, returned to Berlin, where in all respects his position was worthy of himself and of the monarch who appreciated him.

On his return to Prussia he wrote for the fêtes at Court an opera-ballet, *Nurmahal*, the subject of which is taken from Thomas

Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. In this graceful score he inserted—developing it and introducing a chorus—his terrible bacchanal of the *Danaïdes*. He next rewrote the end of the last act of *Cortez*. This new dénouement, which the Paris Opéra did not deign to welcome when *Cortez* was revived six or seven years ago, but which I saw in Berlin, is magnificent, and far superior to the one known in France. In 1825 Spontini produced in Berlin the fairy opera *Alcidor*, at which the author's enemies scoffed greatly, because, they said, of the noisy instrumentation and an orchestra of anvils that accompanied a blacksmiths' chorus. This work is utterly unknown to me. I have, on the other hand, enjoyed the opportunity of going over the score of *Agnès de Hohenstaufen*, which followed *Alcidor* at an interval of twelve years. This subject, classed as *romantic*, is treated in a style totally different from any hitherto employed by Spontini. He has introduced in the ensembles some very curious and difficult combinations, such as, among others, an orchestral storm that goes on while five of the characters sing a quintet on the stage, and a chorus of nuns heard in the distance to the accompaniment of a supposititious organ. That instrument is imitated, to the point of producing the most complete illusion, by means of a small number of wind instruments and double-basses in the wings. Nowadays, when as many organs are to be found in theatres as in churches, this imitation, interesting as it is from the point of a difficulty conquered, seems rather purposeless. To complete the list of Spontini's productions it remains to mention his *Chant du peuple prussien*, and several pieces of music for military bands.

The new king, Frederick William IV, has preserved his predecessor's traditions of kindness and generosity for Spontini, in spite of the unfortunate prominence given to a doubtless imprudent letter written by the artist, a letter which drew upon him a trial followed by a conviction. Not only did the King grant him a pardon, but he consented to Spontini's return to France when his election as a member of the Institut compelled him to take up his residence there, and gave him a proof of his affection by allowing him to retain the title and the salary of Kapellmeister to the Court of Prussia, although he had renounced the duties of the post. Spontini had been inclined towards rest and academic leisure, in the first instance by the persecutions and enmities that were

beginning to be stirred up against him in Berlin, and next by a strange aural malady, the cruel attacks of which he suffered repeatedly over a long term of years. During the periods of this disturbance to an organ he had made such great use of, Spontini could scarcely hear at all, while every isolated sound he could distinguish seemed to him an accumulation of discords. Hence it became absolutely impossible for him to endure music, and he was compelled to give it up until the morbid period should be over.

His entrance into the Institut was nobly carried out, and in a fashion, it must be said, that reflected honour upon French musicians. All those who could have come forward as candidates felt that they should give way to this great glory, and contented themselves, when withdrawing from the contest, with adding their suffrages to those of the entire Académie des Beaux-Arts. In 1811 Spontini had married the sister of Érard, the celebrated pianoforte-manufacturer. The constant care she lavished on him contributed not a little towards appeasing the irritation and alleviating the sorrows to which his nervous nature and causes only too real had made him a prey during the last years of his existence. In 1842 he made a pious pilgrimage to the land of his birth, where he endowed several charitable institutions.

Later, in order to escape from the sad thoughts obsessing him, he decided to undertake a second journey to Majolati. On arriving there he entered the deserted house where he had been born seventy-two years before; there he rested a few weeks, meditating on the many ups and downs of his brilliant but stormy career, and there he died suddenly, rich in glory and in the blessings of his compatriots. The circle was completed; his task was accomplished.

In spite of the honourable inflexibility of his artistic convictions and the firmness of the motives of his judgments, Spontini, whatever they may say, welcomed discussion up to a certain point; he brought to it the warmth that is to be found in all he wrote; nevertheless he surrendered, occasionally with a certain amount of philosophy, when his arguments were exhausted. One day as he was blaming me for my admiration of a modern composition of which he did not think much, I succeeded in giving him fairly good reasons in favour of the work of a great master whom he did not like. He listened to me in astonishment; then, with a sigh, replied

in Latin: "*Hei mihi, qualis est!!! Sed de gustibus et coloribus non est disputandum.*" He wrote and spoke Latin with ease; it was a language he often used in his correspondence with the King of Prussia.

He has been charged with egoism, violence, harshness; but when one considers the incessant hatreds to which he was exposed, the obstacles he had to surmount, the barriers he had to break through, and the tension that this continual state of war must have produced in his mind, it is perhaps permissible to be surprised at his having remained as sociable as he was; more especially if one takes into account the immense value of his creations and the consciousness he had of them, in comparison with the weakness of the majority of his adversaries and of the lack of high-mindedness in their motives.

Spontini was above all things and especially a dramatic composer whose inspiration grew with the importance of the situations and the violence of the passions he had to paint. Hence the pale colouring of his earlier scores, written to puerile and commonplace Italian libretti; the insignificance of the music he applied to the dull, petty, cold, and false genre of which the opéra comique *Julie* is so perfect a model; the ascendant movement of his thought in the two beautiful scenes of *Milton*, the one in which the blind poet laments the misfortune that deprives him for all time of the contemplation of nature's marvels, and that in which Milton dictates to his daughter his verses on the creation of Eve and her appearance amid the peaceful splendours of Eden. Hence, finally, the prodigious and sudden explosion of the genius of Spontini in *La Vestale*, that shower of ardent ideas, those tears of the heart, that stream of noble, touching, proud, threatening melodies, those warmly coloured harmonies, those modulations hitherto unknown in the theatre, that depth of expression (I am always harking back to this), and that luxuriance of grand musical images so naturally presented, set down with such masterly authority, clasping the poet's thought with such strength, that it cannot be conceived that the words to which they are adapted were ever a thing apart.

There are in *Cortez*, not involuntary errors, but a few harmonic harshnesses that were intentional; in *Olympie* I can only see some magnificent audacities in that genre. But the orchestration that in *La Vestale* is so richly temperate becomes complicated in *Cortez*

and is surcharged with various and useless touches in *Olympie*, to the point of occasionally making the instrumentation heavy and confused.

Spontini had a certain number of melodic ideas to cover all expressions of nobility; once the circle of ideas and sentiments to which these melodies were predestined had been completed, their source became less prolific, and that is why we do not find so much originality in the methodic style of the works, at once heroic and impassioned, that followed *La Vestale* and *Cortez*. But what are these vague reminiscences compared with the cynicism with which certain Italian masters reproduce the same cadences, the same phrases, and the same numbers in their innumerable scores? The orchestration of Spontini, the embryo and the processes of which are to be found already in *Milton* and in *Julie*, was his own invention; it derives from no forerunner. Its special colouring is due to the use of the wind-instruments in a way which, if not very expert from a technical point of view, is at least skilfully opposed to the method for the strings. The function, no less important than novel, assigned by the composer to the violas, now massed, now divided like the violins into firsts and seconds, also plays a large part in this special orchestral colour that is characteristic of Spontini. The frequent accentuation of the weak beats of the bar, dissonant notes resolved in another part than the one in which they have been sounded, broadly spread arpeggios of all kinds in the basses, undulating majestically beneath the orchestral mass, the moderate but exceedingly ingenious use of trombones, trumpets, horns, and kettledrums, the almost total exclusion of the shrill high notes of the piccolos, oboes, and clarinets, impart to the orchestra of Spontini's masterpieces a physiognomy of incomparable grandeur, power, energy, and often poetic melancholy.

As regards modulation, Spontini was the first to introduce boldly into dramatic music those described as *foreign* to the main key; also enharmonic modulations. But if they occur somewhat frequently in his works, they are at least always reasoned, and used with admirable art. He never modulates without plausible grounds. He does not behave like those uneasy and sterile musicians who, tired of uselessly tormenting a key without finding anything in it, change to another in order to see if they will be more fortunate in that. Some of Spontini's eccentric modulations are, on the con-

trary, flashes of genius. Of the first order among them is the abrupt passing from the key of E flat to that of D flat in the chorus of soldiers in *Cortez*: "*Quittons ces bords, l'Espagne nous rappelle.*" At this unexpected change of tonality the hearer is at once impressed in such a way that his imagination clears an immense space at a bound; he flies, so to speak, from one hemisphere to the other and, forgetting Mexico, follows in Spain the thought of the mutinous soldiers. I may cite also an example in the trio of the prisoners in the same opera, where at the words: "*Une mort sans gloire termine nos jours,*" the voices pass from G minor to A flat major; and, further, the astounding exclamation of the high priest in *La Vestale*, where the voice drops abruptly from the tonality of D flat major to that of C major in the line: "*Vont-ils dans le chaos replonger l'univers?*"

It is Spontini again who invented the colossal crescendo of which his imitators have subsequently given us a mere microscopic diminutive. Such a one is that in the second act of *La Vestale*, when Julia, delirious and no longer struggling against her passion, feels terror blending with it and growing with the love in her distracted soul:

*Où vais-je? . . . ô ciel! et quel délire
S'est emparé de tous mes sens?
Un pouvoir invincible à ma perte conspire;
Il m'entraîne . . . il me presse. . . Arrête! il en est temps!*

This progression of wailing harmonies broken by heavy and more and more violent pulsations is an astounding invention, the full value of which can only be felt in the theatre, not in the concert hall. So it is again with the crescendo of the first finale of *Cortez*, when the Mexican women, distraught by terror, run to throw themselves at Montezuma's feet:

*Quels cris retentissent!
Tous nos enfants périssent!*

I have already referred to the crescendo of the finale of *La Vestale*. Need I mention the duet between Telasco and Amazily, which begins with perhaps the most admirable recitative in ex-

istence; or the one between Amazily and Cortez, in which the martial fanfares of the Spanish army blend in so dramatic a fashion with the passionate adieus of the two lovers; or the grandiose aria of Telasco: *Ô patrie! ô lieux pleins de charmes!*" or Julia's in *La Vestale*: "*Impitoyables dieux!*" or the funeral march; or the aria at the tomb in the same opera; or the duet between Licinius and the high priest, a duet that Weber declared to be one of the most astounding known to him? . . . Need I speak of the triumphal and religious march in *Olympie*, or the chorus of Diana's dismayed priests when the statue veils itself, or the extraordinary air and situation when Statira, sobbing with indignation, reproaches the hierophant with having brought her as son-in-law the assassin of Alexander, or the choral march of Telasco's train of attendants, also in *Cortez*: "*Quels sons nouveaux,*" the first and only one written in triple measure; or the bacchanal in *Nurmahal*; or the numberless recitatives, beautiful as the most beautiful airs, and of an accent so truthful as to make the ablest masters despair; or those slow dance-movements that, with their dreamy and tender melodic inflexions, at once evoke the sentiment of voluptuousness and poetize it? . . . I lose myself in the sinuous windings of this great temple of *Expressive Music*, in the thousand details of its rich architecture, in the dazzling medley of its ornaments.

The unintelligent, frivolous, or gross herd forsakes the temple today and refuses or neglects to sacrifice at the shrine; but for a few, artists and amateurs, who are perhaps more numerous than is generally believed, the goddess to whom Spontini erected this vast monument is still so beautiful that their fervour does not cool. And I, like them, prostrate myself and worship her.

“And so do all of us,” say the musicians, rising to leave; “we worship her, believe us.”

“I know it, gentlemen, and it is because I am convinced of it that I allowed myself to lay bare to you my passionate admiration. Such ideas and such deeply felt sentiments are expressed only to an audience that shares them. Farewell, gentlemen!”

FOURTEENTH EVENING

Operas succeed and resemble one another.—

The Question of the Beautiful.—Schiller's "Mary Stuart."—

A Visit to Tom Thumb, an improbable story



N opera is being performed, etc., etc., etc., entitled *L'Enchanteur Merlin*. This evening Corsino has the floor. Let us listen to what he has to say.

Corsino

It is frequently said that operas are like the days; they follow and resemble one another. It would be more accurate to say, while still retaining the same comparison, that they follow, but do not resemble one another. We have, it is true, fine days of summer, radiant, calm, splendid, full of harmony and light, during which the whole creation seems to be all love and happiness; the nightingale hidden in the bush, the lark lost in the blue of the sky, the cricket in the grass, the bee gathering honey, the countryman at his plough, the child playing on the threshold of the farm, the aristocratic beauty whose elegant silhouette is outlined in white on the dark green of a park full of shadow and mystery. On days like that, to breathe, to see, to hear, is to be happy.

The next day the sun rises gloomy and veiled; a thick mist makes the atmosphere heavy, all things languish on mountain and plain; the song-birds are silent; nothing is heard save the silly notes of the cuckoo, the harsh, stupid cries of the geese, the peacocks, and the guinea-fowls; the frog croaks, the dog howls, the child mewls, the vane creaks on the roof; then an enervating wind returns on itself, and at last, at eventide, dies away under a silent, tepid rain, malodorous as the water of a marsh. Do we not also have sublime days of storm, when the thunder and the winds, the crash of the torrents, the tumult of the forest crying out under the attacks of tempest, flood, and fire, fill the soul with vast and terrible emotions? . . . In what then do the days resemble one another? Is it by their length, the degrees of their heat or cold,

the beauty of the twilights that precede the rise or accompany the setting of the sun? Only that! We see days and operas that are deathly cold succeed days and operas of a burning heat; a production that has shone brilliantly during the life of its composer is extinguished abruptly when he dies, as light is at sunset in equinoctial countries; another, which in the first instance showed mere pale reflections, is lit up, at the composer's death, with lasting splendours, and takes on a marvellous brilliancy comparable to the crepuscular gleams and the aurora borealis that make certain polar nights more beautiful than the days.

I therefore maintain the correctness of my comparison: operas, like days, follow but do not resemble one another. Astronomers and critics afterwards come and supply us with a host of more or less valid explanations of these phenomena. Some of them say: This is why hail fell yesterday, and why it will be fine tomorrow. Others say: This is the reason of the failure of the latest opera, and the cause of the success that the next one will achieve. Still others admit that they know nothing about it, and that after studying the inconstancy of the winds and of the public, the infinite variety of tastes and temperatures, the endless caprices of nature and the human mind, they have to acknowledge the immensity of their ignorance, and that causes, even the most immediate ones, are unknown to them.

Myself

You are right, my dear Corsino, and I must admit that I am one of those learned men. I have sometimes thought that I descried in the heavens a new star, the size and the brilliancy of which seemed to me considerable, and I have found myself denying not only the importance, but the very existence of Neptune. Then, when I said: "The moon is one of the lesser celestial bodies, and it is only its close proximity to the earth that makes us attribute to it a volume it does not possess; Sirius, on the contrary, is an immense star," I met with the rejoinder: "Why on earth do you talk about Sirius? It occupies in the heavens no more space than a pin's head! We far prefer our majestic moon."

Following the track of this argument, I succeeded in finding people who preferred a street gas-lamp to the moon, and a rag-picker's lantern to the street gas-lamp.

And that is why there does not exist a solitary production of the human mind, not a single one, you understand, that gathers to itself, I will not say the suffrages of all humanity, but even those of the imperceptible fraction of humanity to which it addresses itself exclusively. How many people can the largest theatre of today hold? Barely a couple of thousand, and the majority of theatres much less. Well, has it ever happened, given an excellent performance, that even five hundred persons assembled together in a theatre have been in agreement concerning the merits of Shakspeare, Molière, Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, or Weber? I have heard students hiss *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* at the Odéon. We all know the fights that occurred at the Théâtre-Français over Alfred de Vigny's translation of Shakspeare's *Othello*, and the hooting that greeted Rossini's *Il Barbiere* in Rome and *Der Freischütz* in Paris. I have never yet attended a first-night at the Opéra without finding among the judges of the foyer an enormous majority hostile to the new work, however great and beautiful it may have been. Nor does there exist a single score, be it as null, as empty, and as flat as anyone can imagine, that does not reap a few suffrages or fails to meet with eulogists in all good faith; as if to justify the proverb that says: "There is no wench so ungainly but what can find a husband."

This or that opinion, sustained with some heat behind the curtain, is no less warmly combated in the orchestra. Of four hearers occupying the same box at the performance of an opera, the first is bored, the second is entertained, the third is indignant, and the fourth is enthusiastic. Voltaire told France that Shakspeare was a Huron, a drunken Iroquois; and France believed Voltaire. And yet the most fervent disciple of the philosopher of Ferney, convinced of the absolute truth of the sentence pronounced on the author of *Hamlet*, had only to cross the Channel to find the contrary opinion current. On one side of the Channel Shakspeare was a brute, a barbarian; on the other, a god. In France today, were Voltaire able to return and again express a similar opinion, no matter how much he was, is, and will be Voltaire, people would laugh in his face; nay, I know people who would do even worse. The question of what is beautiful would therefore seem to be a question of time and place; it is sad to have to think so . . . but it is true. As to the *absolute beautiful*, if it is not that which in all

times, in all places, and by all men would be acknowledged as beautiful, I fail to know in what it consists. Now, this kind of the beautiful does not exist. I believe simply that there are beauties in art the sentiment of which, having become inherent to certain civilizations, will last, thanks to a few men, as long as the civilizations themselves. . . .

“Why,” resumes Corsino, after a silence, and as if seeking to head off a conversation that was painful to him, “why did you not go to the performance of Schiller’s *Mary Stuart* the day before yesterday? Our leading actors appeared in it, and the masterpiece, I can assure you, was not at all badly played.”

“You may none the less, I trust, number me among the most sincere admirers of Schiller; yet I must confess to you my insuperable antipathy to dramas in which the block, the ax, and the executioner appear. I cannot endure them. This kind of death and the preparations it calls for have something so hideous in them! Nothing has ever inspired me with a greater aversion to the multitude, to the rabble of every rank and class, than the horrible fervour with which it is seen rushing on certain days to the place of execution. When picturing to myself this eager mob gaping about a scaffold, I always dream of the joy it would be to me to have at my hand eight or ten guns charged with grape-shot, to annihilate at a single blow these horrible blackguards without having to touch them. For I can conceive blood being spilt in this fashion, from a distance, with flames and thunder, when one is angered; and I would rather pour grape-shot into forty of my enemies than see a single one of them guillotined.”

Corsino, nodding, approved: “You have artistic tastes.”

“As to that poor charming Queen Mary,” says Winter, “I agree with you that they could very well have destroyed her without going and spoiling her beautiful neck.”

“Why,” answers Dimsky, “perhaps it was precisely that beautiful neck that Elizabeth had a grudge against. At all events, *destroy* is a happy find; I approve of the word.”

“Oh, gentlemen, how can you laugh and jest over such a catastrophe, over so awful a crime?”

“Moran is right,” resumes Corsino; “since these gentlemen are

in such a merry mood tonight, spin them some good silly yarn, Schmidt; it is a long time since you have given us anything in that line; you must have a rich fund to draw upon."

Schmidt, the third horn, has a grotesque face that incites to mirth. He is reputed to be witty, and his habitual taciturnity gives his sallies more value than they actually possess; moreover, his mimicry equals that of a first-class buffoon.

Schmidt, then, responding to the invitation, blows his nose, takes an enormous pinch of snuff, and without further ado, raising his shrill voice, says:

A Visit to Tom Thumb

The scene represents . . . an amusingly simple French provincial, who calls himself a great lover of music, and on these grounds is in despair because he had not been able to attend the soirées of the dwarf Tom Thumb. He is aware that this Lilliputian phenomenon has completely carried the Parisians away during an indefinite number of months; he has undertaken the trip to Paris for the sole purpose of admiring the little General, who is reputed to be so witty, so gracious, and so polite, but unfortunately the performances of this prodigy have been interrupted for the time being. What is he to do? . . . A letter of introduction with which our provincial has been provided opens to him the door of an artist renowned for his talent as a practical joker. Having heard Tom Thumb's admirer's account of his disappointment, the artist says to him: "My dear sir, I can fully understand that for a friend of the arts like yourself this is indeed a cruel disappointment. . . . You are from Quimper, I believe? . . ."—"Yes, sir, from Quimper-Corentin."—"To think you have made so long a journey in vain! . . . Let me see, I have an idea; Tom Thumb, it is true, is not performing any more, but he is in Paris; bless me, go and call on him, he is a gentleman, and he will give you a warm welcome."—"Oh, sir, how indebted I shall be to you if I can get to see him! I am so fond of music!"—"Yes, he does not sing at all badly. Here is his address: rue Saint-Lazare, at the corner of the rue de la Rochefoucauld, a long avenue, at the end of which is the house wherein Tom Thumb breathes; it is a sacred abode inhabited successively by Talma, Mademoiselle Mars, Made-

moiselle Duchesnois, Horace Vernet, and Thalberg; and Tom Thumb now shares it with the celebrated pianist. Not a word to the hall-porter, but just stroll to the end of the avenue, and, following the precept of the evangelist, knock and it will be opened unto you.”—“Oh, sir, I hasten to go; I think I see him, I think I already hear him. I feel all upset at the thought. . . . You cannot have an idea of my passion for music!”

And so our amateur runs panting to the address given him; he walks up the steps, he knocks with a trembling hand; a colossus opens the door to him. Chance would have it that Lablache, who is living with Thalberg, his son-in-law, is just on the point of going out.

“Whom are you looking for, sir?” says the illustrious singer to the stranger.

“I wish to see General Tom Thumb.”

“I am he,” replies Lablache with shattering self-possession and in his most tremendous tone.¹

“But—how is it—they told me the General reached no higher than my knee, and that his charming voice—resembled—that—of the—cicadas. I do not recognize—”

“You do not recognize Tom Thumb? And yet it is I, sir, who have the honour of being that famous artist. My stature and my voice are truly what you have been told—that is to say, *in public*, but you will understand that in my house *I make myself at home*.”

Thereupon Lablache strides away majestically, while the lover of music stands lost in amazement, flushed with pride and joy at having seen *General Tom Thumb as a private individual*, and in his full size.

*Ceci, Messieurs, vaut bien
Notre enchanteur Merlin,
Et c'est plus vraisemblable.*

(This, gentlemen, is worth as much as our Merlin, the enchanter, and is more probable.)

¹ Lablache was an enormous man. “His shoe,” says Chorley, “was as big as a child’s boat. One could have clad the child in one of his gloves; and the child could almost have walked (though no Blondin) on his belt.” (E. N.)

Corsino rises: "I was sure he would finish with a *point*. One line more, and we should have got a quatrain full in the face. Decidedly, Schmidt, you were born to write vaudevilles—German ones."

FIFTEENTH EVENING

Another Worry of Kleiner senior



BEETHOVEN'S *Fidelio* is being performed.

Not a word is spoken in the orchestra. The eyes of all the artists are sparkling, those of the mere musicians remain open, those of the fools close from time to time. Tamberlik, engaged by the director of our theatre for a few performances, sings Florestan. He revolutionizes the house with his prison song. The pistol quartet drives the house wild with enthusiasm.

After the grand finale Kleiner senior exclaims: "That music sets my stomach afire. I feel as if I had swallowed fifteen glasses of brandy. I am off to the café, to ask for a—"

"There's none left," interrupts Dimsky; "I have just brought Tamberlik the last one, which he has earned well."

Kleiner departs grumbling.

SIXTEENTH EVENING

*Musical and Phrenological Studies.—
Nightmares.—The Puritans of Sacred Music.—
Paganini, a biographical sketch*



CONCERT made up of mediocre and bad music is being given at the theatre; the program is one mass of Italian cavatinas, fantasias for piano solo, fragments of masses, flute concertos, *Lieder* with trombone-solo obbligato, bassoon duets, etc. As a consequence, talk flourishes in every corner of the orchestra. A few musicians sketch. There is a competition for a pencil drawing of the scene of Lablache saying on his threshold to the provincial who asks for Tom Thumb: "I am he, sir!" Kleiner senior is awarded the prize; this is something of a consolation to him for his previous day's worry. On arriving I take a look at the program.

"The devil! We have tonight a formidable number of nightmares!"

"Nightmare! Another of your Parisian words that we do not understand," says Winter to me. "Pray explain it to us."

"Beware, young American, you are on the way to becoming one."

"A what?"

"A nightmare, you thrice-wretched musicaster!" retorts Corsino, "and I am going to prove it to you. This is what we European musicians understand by that word:

"It is in this instance not a question of one of those frightful dreams during which one feels a weight on the chest, imagines oneself to be hunted by some monster ever on the point of catching its victim, feels oneself dropping into a bottomless pit, in a gloomy darkness and a silence more terrifying than the noises of hell. No, it is not that, and yet it almost is. A musical nightmare is one of those indescribable realities one loathes and despises, which haunt you, irritate you, and produce a pain in the stomach akin to that of indigestion; one of those works infected with a kind of choleraic contagion, which, in spite of every sanitary cordon,

somehow or other find their way into the midst of all that is finest and most beautiful in music, yet are endured with a wry face and not hissed; sometimes because they are constructed with a sort of mediocre and common talent, sometimes because their composer is a decent fellow whose feelings one would not like to hurt, or again for the reason that they are connected with a line of thought dear to a friend, or yet again because they interest some fool who has been vain enough to pose as your enemy, and you do not wish, by treating him according to his deserts, to appear to concern yourself with him. When the damnable work begins, you leave (if you can manage it) the hall in which it is strutting; you go into the street to watch the pranks of a trained dog or a Punch and Judy show, or listen to the big aria from *La Favorita* mewed by a barrel-organ and breaking off on the leading note, a sou tossed from a window having interrupted the virtuoso in the middle of his melody. You next read all the posters; then, looking at your watch, you reckon that the nightmare of the concert is no longer to be dreaded and you venture to return to the concert-room; but that is the very moment when the nightmare sometimes cruelly punishes the poor musician who has fled from it. He enters the hall; the nightmare is over, it is true, but what is that noise he hears? What is the meaning of that applause? For whom is it intended? These signs of satisfaction emanate from the public and are addressed to the nightmare in person, who throws out his chest, puts on side, coos, and bows modestly. Heavens above us! The public has found the beast amiable and agreeable, and thanks it for the pleasure it has given it!

"Then you get mad, and would like to be at the antipodes among the savages, in the midst of a tribe of Borneo monkeys, not to say among the ferocious gold-seekers of California! It is then that one realizes the nothingness of glory, the absurdity of the success which masterpieces obtain at the hands of judges who are capable of thus applauding nightmares. . . . And you see how sagacious was the ancient orator who, turning anxiously towards his friend after the multitude had waxed enthusiastic over one of his speeches, said: 'The people applaud me; have I then said something foolish?'

"In addition to the nightmare-compositions, the greater part of which are written in a style that can only be called the stupid

style, we have the nightmare-men. There is the nightmare-orator who stops you at street corners or pins you in front of the drawing-room mantelpiece, in order to saturate you with his doctrines; the one who proves to all comers the superiority of Oriental music to ours; the old theorist who everywhere finds mistakes in harmony; the discoverer of ancient manuscripts, before which he falls into ecstasy; the defender of the rules of the fugue; the man who worships exclusively the *connected, even, and dead* style, the enemy of expression and life; the admirer of the organ, the Mass of Pope Marcellus, the Mass of the Armed Man, and the *chansons de gestes*. All these people are the *greatest nightmares that could be named*. And then we have the fond mothers who present their infant prodigies to you, and the composers who willy-nilly try to get you to read their scores, and all bourgeois who talk music, and all bores, not forgetting the inquisitive simpletons. And that is why, dear Winter, the gentleman has the right to say to you: 'You are one more of them!' Listen to this, gentlemen!" (The *O salutaris* of a great master is being sung.) "Just see how this specimen of the stupid style is thrust upon us! The author sets the words *Da robur, fer auxilium* to an energetic phrase symbolic of strength (*robur*). Of a hundred composers who have treated this subject since Gossec, there are perhaps not two who have steered clear of the misunderstanding consecrated by that old master as a model."

"How so?" asks Bacon.

"The *O salutaris* constitutes a prayer, does it not? In it the Christian begs God for *strength*, he implores His *help*; but if he asks for them it is a sign that he does not possess them and that he feels the need of them. It is therefore a feeble being who prays, and his voice, when pronouncing the *Da robur*, should be as humble as possible, instead of bursting into accents that partake more of the nature of a menace than of a supplication.

"And things of this sort are called masterpieces of sacred music!!! . . .

"Rather masterpieces of stupidity. Nightmares!

"And those who admire them—arch-nightmares!

"Compositions in which sacred texts are treated in the would-be expressive style superabound in similar nonsensicalities.

"These nonsensicalities have undoubtedly been the pretext for

the formation of a sect of the most singular kind, which nowadays preserves in its conventicles a laughable question in the order of the day. This innocent schism, with the object, it asserts, of creating true *Catholic* music, tends to the total suppression of music in the divine service. These Anabaptists of art would not tolerate violins in the churches, because violins recall theatrical music (as if the double-basses, the violas, all the other instruments, and the voices themselves were not in the same position); while in their opinion the new organs have been provided with too many and too expressive stops. They next reached the point of looking upon melody, rhythm, and even modern tonality as damnable. The moderates still admit Palestrina; but the perfervid ones, the Balfours of Burleigh of these new Puritans, will have nothing but plain-song in the raw.

"One of them, the MacBriar of the sect, goes even further; this fellow has attained at a bound the goal towards which all the others are moving more slowly, and this goal surely means, as I have just said, the destruction of sacred music. This is how I came to learn what was at the back of his mind in regard to the matter. A short time after the death of the Duc d'Orléans I attended the funeral service held in the church of Notre-Dame for this noble prince, the object of such deep and justifiable regret. The Puritan sect, triumphant on that occasion, had obtained an order that the mass should be sung in plain-song and that the accursed modern tonality, *dramatic*, *impassioned*, and *expressive*, should be prohibited radically. The choir-master of Notre-Dame, however, thought he ought to compromise up to a certain point with the corruption of the age, by adding four-part harmony to the funereal plain-song. He had not felt strong enough to break away altogether from the profane thing; the grace sufficient had doubtless been insufficient. However this may be, I found myself seated in the nave, next to our fiery MacBriar. While execrating modern music, which *excites the passions*, he was amusingly crazy about plain-song, which, we have to admit, is far from possessing that grave defect. Nevertheless he controlled his feelings fairly well until the middle of the ceremony. A somewhat prolonged silence having ensued, and the congregation being sunk in deep and solemn meditation, the organist inadvertently let a key drop on

the keyboard; in consequence of this accidental pressure, a flute-stop A was heard for a couple of seconds. This isolated note soared aloft in the midst of the silence, and re-echoed in the vault of the cathedral, like a soft mysterious wail. At once my man sprang to his feet in transport, exclaiming, without respect for the real devotional absorption of his neighbours: 'Admirable! Sublime! There is the true sacred music! This is pure art in its divine simplicity! All other music is infamous and profane!'

"Well, well! here was a logician. According to him, in sacred music there must be neither melody, nor harmony, nor rhythm, nor instrumentation, nor expression, nor modern tonality (for the last-named recalls the music of the Greeks, who were pagans). He only needs an A sustained for an instant in the midst of the silence of a crowd—a crowd, it must be said, moved and prostrate. It might be possible, however, to disturb his ecstasy by assuring him that theatres make an habitual and frequent use of this celestial A. But we must agree that his system of *monotonous* music (if that description is not literally in place here, I don't know where it is) can easily be put into practice, and at a very small cost. From this point of view it has a real advantage.

"There exists a brain disease that Italian physicians style *pazzia*, and the English *madness*; it is clearly this that reigns and rages among the disciples of the new musical Church. I could name several of them who are just as completely mad at this moment as was the admirer of the solitary A. They have sometimes tried to draw me into a formal discussion on the doctrine suggested to them by their malady, but I knew better than to be drawn, contenting myself with saying to the Gregorians, the Ambrosians, the Palestrinians, the Presbyterians, the Puritans, the Shakers, the Anabaptists, the Unitarians, all more or less smitten with *madness* or *pazzia*: '*Raca!* (Fool!)' for sole answer, adding: 'Nightmares; triple nightmares!' The greater portion of these people, I suspect, believe that, melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, and expression once suppressed in the sacred style, they will then be able themselves to write most beautiful sacred music. And indeed, if none of these qualities are to be needed in this sort of composition, they have all that is required for them to be successful in it."

"Heavens!" exclaims Corsino, "here is Racloski, who is going to play to a piano accompaniment the B minor Rondo of Paganini!"

"The Campanella Rondo? What infernal cheek! He's crazy; he won't be able to play two bars of it decently."

"Does he at least play in tune?"

"To do him justice in this respect, it must be admitted that during the course of a long piece like that it often happens that he plays in tune."

"Thanks, I'm off."

"Don't, for heaven's sake, desert us in the hour of danger. We know you have been on intimate terms with Paganini; tell us something about him; it will prevent our hearing his work played by that catgut-scraper. Be quick, he is going to start."

"Really you are making a rhapsode of me! I obey. But don't you think that certain performers should be forbidden, under severe penalties, thus to *attack*, as you style it, certain compositions? Don't you think that masterpieces should be protected against such profanations?"

"Yes, there is no doubt they should, and a time will come, I hope, when they will be. Of all the many Greek artists, Alexander considered only one worthy of depicting his features and forbade all the others to attempt to reproduce them. And the most gifted virtuosi alone should have the right to transmit to the public the thought of the great masters, those Alexanders of art!"

Bacon: "Come now, that's a good idea! That Greek composer was no fool. Where the deuce can Corsino have read about him?"

"Silence now, please!"

Paganini

A man of much wit, Choron, used to say when speaking of Weber: "He is a meteor!" One might equally say of Paganini: "He is a comet!" for never did flaming star appear so unexpectedly in the heaven of art, or excite, in the course of his immense ellipse, greater astonishment, blended with a kind of terror, before disappearing for ever. The comets of the physical world, if poets and the popular idea are to be credited, appear only in times precursory of the terrible storms that upheave the human ocean.

Assuredly it is not our epoch, nor the apparition of Paganini,

that will in this respect give the lie to tradition. This genius, exceptional and unique in his own line, was developing in Italy at the time of the début of the greatest events that history mentions; he began to play at the court of one of the sisters of Napoleon at the most solemn hour of the Empire; he passed triumphantly through Germany just as the giant had gone to his grave; he made his appearance in France to the noise of a crumbling dynasty and he entered Paris at the same time as the cholera.

The terror inspired by this scourge was nevertheless powerless to restrain the outburst of curiosity in the first place, and of enthusiasm in the next, that drew the masses towards Paganini; it is difficult to believe in such emotion being evoked by a virtuoso in such circumstances, but it is an actual fact. Paganini, by affecting so violently the imagination and the heart of the Parisians, made them forget even the death hovering over them. Moreover all things conspired to increase his prestige: his strange and fascinating exterior, the mystery surrounding his life, the tales told concerning him, even the crimes his enemies had had the stupid audacity to impute to him, and the miracles of a talent that upset all accepted ideas, disdained all known methods, announced the impossible, and accomplished it. This irresistible influence of Paganini made itself felt not only in the world of amateurs and artists; princes of art themselves succumbed to it. It is said that Rossini, that great scoffer at enthusiasm, felt for him a sort of passion mingled with fear. Meyerbeer, during Paganini's peregrinations in the north of Europe, followed him step by step, ever more and more eager to hear him, and vainly seeking to penetrate the mystery of his phenomenal talent.

Unfortunately I know this boundless musical power of Paganini only by what has been told me; a fateful concatenation of circumstances so willed it that he never performed publicly in France when I was there, and I have sorrowfully to confess that in spite of the frequent relations I was lucky enough to have with him during the last years of his life, *I have never heard him*. Once only, after my return from Italy, he played at the Opéra; but, confined to my room by a severe ailment, it was impossible for me to attend that concert, the last, unless I am mistaken, that he gave. From that day on, the laryngeal disease he was to die of, coupled with a nervous malady that gave him no respite, growing

more and more serious, he was forced to give up entirely the exercise of his art. But since he loved music passionately, it being a veritable necessity to him, he would occasionally, during the rare moments of respite allowed him by his sufferings, take up his violin again to play in trios and quartets of Beethoven, the performances being organized unexpectedly and strictly among friends, the audience consisting only of the players themselves. At other times, when playing the violin tired him too much, he would take from his portfolio a collection of duets composed by him for the violin and guitar (a collection unknown to the world), and taking for partner a worthy German violinist, named Herr Sina, who is still a professor in Paris, he would take the guitar part and draw unheard-of effects from that instrument. And the two performers, Sina, the unassuming violinist, and Paganini, the incomparable guitarist, would thus spend together long evenings to which no one, even among the most worthy, ever succeeded in being admitted. In the end his laryngeal consumption made such progress that he entirely lost his voice, and thenceforth he was compelled to give up virtually all social relations. It was with difficulty that it was still possible to hear some of his words by bringing one's ear close to his lips. And when I happened to stroll about with him in Paris, on days when the sun made him want to go out, I carried an album and a pencil; Paganini would write in a few words the subject to which he wished to direct the conversation; I would develop it as best I could, and from time to time, taking the pencil once more, he would interrupt me with reflections that were often very original in their laconism. The deaf Beethoven also used an album to receive the ideas of his friends; the dumb Paganini used it to transmit his own. One of those collectors of autographs *at any price*, who haunt the drawing-rooms of artists, has doubtless *borrowed*, without forewarning me, the album used by my illustrious interlocutor; what is certain is that I was unable to find it one day when Spontini wished to see it, and that from that day to this I have been no more fortunate in finding it.

I have often been asked to tell in all its details the episode in the life of Paganini in which he played so cordially magnificent a part in relation to myself; the various incidents that preceded and followed the principal event, which is now common property

—incidents of a kind far remote from the ordinary path of the artistic life—would indeed, I believe, be of lively interest; but you will readily conceive how embarrassing it would be for me to tell such a story; and so you will forgive me for remaining silent.

I do not even consider it necessary to refer to the silly insinuations, the foolish denials, and the erroneous assertions that Paganini's noble conduct gave rise to on the occasion of which I speak. By way of compensation, never did certain critics find better expressions of praise; never did the prose of Jules Janin more especially shape itself into finer periods than on this occasion. At a later epoch also the Italian poet Romani wrote for the *Gazette piémontaise* some eloquent pages, which deeply moved Paganini, who read them at Marseilles. . . .

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He had been compelled to fly from the Paris climate; soon after his arrival in Marseilles, that of Provence seeming also to be too severe for him, he settled for the winter in Nice, where he was welcomed as he deserved to be and surrounded with the most affectionate care by a wealthy lover of music, himself a virtuoso, the Comte di Cesole. None the less his sufferings went on increasing (although he himself did not consider himself in danger of death), and his letters breathed a deep sadness. "If God permits," he wrote to me, "I shall see you next spring. I hope that the state of my health is going to improve here; it is the last remaining hope. Farewell, love me as I love you."

I was not to see him again. . . . A few years later, myself compelled to ask help of the balmy breezes of the Sardinian Sea after the severe fatigues of a laborious musical season in Paris, I was one day returning in a boat from Villafranca to Nice, when the young fisherman conveying me suddenly dropped his oars, showed me on the bank a little isolated villa of somewhat strange aspect, and said: "Have you ever heard of a gentleman named Paganini, who brought such beautiful sounds out of the violin?"—"Yes, my lad, I have heard speak of him."—"Well, sir, it is there that he lived for three weeks after his death."

It seems, indeed, that his body rested in this villa during the long contest that arose between his son and the Bishop of Genoa

thor could ever have played them. It would need a volume to indicate all the new effects that Paganini has introduced in his works, the ingenious devices, the grand and noble forms, the orchestral combinations never even dreamt of before. His melody is the great Italian melody, but generally vibrating with a more passionate ardour than the melody met with in the finest pages of the dramatic composers of his land. His harmony is always clear, simple, and of extraordinary sonority.

He made the solo violin tellingly prominent by tuning his four strings a semitone higher than those of the violins of the orchestra; he could thus play in the brilliant keys of D and A, while the orchestra accompanied him in the less sonorous tones of E flat and B flat. It is past belief what he discovered in the use of simple and double harmonics and of notes plucked with the left hand, in the way of arpeggios, in bowing, in passages on three strings, all the more so as his predecessors had not even put him on the track of these. Paganini is one of those artists of whom it must be said they are because they are, not because others were before them.

What unfortunately he could not transmit to his successors was the fire that animated him and made his astounding prodigies of mechanism sympathetic. The idea can be written, the form may be outlined, but the feeling for performance cannot be fixed; it is impossible to grasp it; it is genius, soul, the flame of life, which, when it passes away, leaves behind a darkness all the more profound because its brilliance has been more dazzling. And this is the reason not only why the works of the great virtuosi inventors lose more or less from not being played by their composer, but also why those of great, original, and expressive composers preserve only part of their power when the author does not preside at their performance.

The orchestra of Paganini is brilliant and energetic, without being noisy. He made use of the big drum in his *tutti*, and often with uncommon intelligence. In the prayer in *Moïse*, Rossini, as elsewhere, simply makes it come in on the strong beats. Paganini, when composing his fantasia on the same theme, has taken good care not to imitate him in that respect. At the opening of the melody *Del tuo stellato soglio*, Rossini strikes on the penultimate syllable, which comes on the strong beat; but Paganini, regarding the melodic accent placed on the syllable following as incomparably

more important, brings the drum in on the weak beat, and the effect resulting from this change is, in my opinion, much better and very original.

One day, after complimenting Paganini on this piece, someone added: "You must admit that Rossini has supplied you there with a fine theme!" Paganini retorted: "All the same, he didn't discover my big-drum stroke."

It would be very difficult for me to go further into the analysis of the works of this phenomenal artist, inspired works that are the written manifestation of his marvellous faculties as a virtuoso. Besides . . . these reminiscences tonight. . . .

"And you never heard him?" asks Corsino of me.

"Never. . . . Good-night, gentlemen."

SEVENTEENTH EVENING

Rossini's "Barbier de Séville" is being performed



NOT a word is spoken in the orchestra. Corsino contents himself, at the close of the opera, with remarking that the actor *charged* with the role of Almaviva in that sparkling masterpiece was born to be a burgomaster, and that Figaro would have made an admirable cathedral beadle.

EIGHTEENTH EVENING

*Accusation Brought against the Author's Criticisms.—
His Defence.—Reply of the Advocate-General.—
Documents in Support.—Analysis of "The Beacon."—
Submarine Representatives.—Analysis of "Diletta."—
An Idyll.—The Piano gone mad*



GERMAN opera is being performed for the first time, etc.

The orchestra does its duty during the first act; discouragement seems to overtake the musicians during the second; one after the other they put their instruments aside, and conversations begin.

"Here you have a work," Corsino says to me, "about which, if you had to do a notice of it, you could exercise your talent for not saying anything; and that, you will admit, is the severest criticism of all."

"How so? I always try to say something in my wretched feuilletons. Only I try to vary the form of them; what you describe as not saying anything is often a way of speaking very clearly."

"Yes, one of the fiendishly wicked things that Frenchmen alone can invent. I am going to let these gentlemen judge for themselves. I have the collection of *bouquets à Chloris*¹ made by you so far; I am off to get it, so that they may appreciate the fragrance of the flowers of these bouquets." (*Exit.*)

Addressing me, Dervinck says: "I hardly know what he means by your *bouquets à Chloris*. We Germans also indulge in criticism, but our way of doing it is quite simple; a new work appears, we go to hear it, and if, after having listened to it attentively, it seems to us beautiful, great, and original, we write—"

"That it is detestable," interposes Winter, who has composed a poor ballet. (Corsino re-enters carrying a bundle of newspapers.)

"Here, gentlemen, are those masterpieces of courtesy and kind-

¹The expression means the presentation of a birthday gift, or one made on a festal day. Chloris was the wife of Zephyr. (Translator's note.)

ness. Let us study them. You will first of all notice that if he wants to jeer at the author of a libretto, without making the slightest remark about his poetry, he has recourse to the atrocious method of telling the story in verse that runs along like prose. Just look at the flattering effect thus produced. I select a scene at hazard; here is a horde of Arabs, marching in time and singing, according to custom: 'Speak not! Hide ourselves! Let us be silent!' The critic thus describes the scene:²

They steal away silently in the darkness of the night, but a group follows them. The Kaid, a fat old fellow and somewhat round-shouldered, and after all not very proud of his authority, fears, when going his round, some encounter that will bring him hard knocks, and then, in a crack, his being put into a sack, and tossed over the walls by unfeeling men, to meet his death in the waters of the port.

He has not gone twenty paces before heavy cudgel-blows rain on his shoulders and beat him to the ground. 'Help! They are hammering me to death! Murder!' A gentleman drives the assassins off and calls the neighbours; one of them, a young girl with a murderous face, and wearing a short petticoat, hurries to the spot. The belaboured man, while telling his tale of woe, moans, screams, and whines: 'I have lost a tooth! I shall die of this! The scoundrel! He has broken my back! He whacked me too hard, for sure.'

"Here is another in which the verses of the author of the foregoing libretto precede and follow the false prose of the critic, so as to produce a grotesque mixture. It is about a young man whom it is sought to hold as security for debts incurred.

ALBERT

Good heavens!

RODOLPHE

'Tis but fair, and this precious pledge is required by the law to remain as hostage in this place.

² In the original this is in rhymed verse that is printed as continuous prose. (E. N.)

Zila is in distress, Albert consoles her, but time is flying. Oh! what is to become of him? Rodolphe invites him to take shelter in his château. Quick, Albert, you must fly. Come, you old Jew, you greasy-faced beast, lend this young man a large sum of money; he offers you as security his freedom, his life. He has put his signature to the transaction, does that satisfy you?—Yes, here is the money.—I can now take him with me; inhuman innkeeper, I no more owe you anything.—Come my love, my own!—What's this? But, says the Count, this youth affronts me, I must subdue him, or my reputation is gone. Come, you son of Isaac, take the note of the young rascal out of your pouch. I will have it.—What, without my getting any profit?—Upon my word, you are making cent per cent.³

RODOLPHE

Oh, what a good stroke of business
 I have just made (*pointing to Albert*)!
 That note, will, I hope,
 Rid me of him.
 Yes, by my skill,
 I have redeemed
 His youthful mistress
 Or his freedom.

MYSELF

You think this atrocious, my dear Corsino; but there is not even a malicious afterthought in it all. It was the swing of the rhythm that carried me away and made me write like that. After you have heard a barrel-organ play you the same tune for an hour, do you not end by singing that tune in spite of yourself, however ugly it may be? It is therefore quite natural that when giving an account of operas with verses like these, the verses become transformed into my prose, and it is afterwards only by a great effort that I can unrhyme myself. Besides, why consider me capable of irony towards opera *poets*? Their mistakes, if they commit any, are out of my line. I am not a literary man. That literary

³ All this, again, is rhymed. (E. N.)

men should domineer over music, that's all right, they are entitled to do so; but never, I swear it to you, will it ever enter my head to venture on literary criticism. You slander me. The dread of being too insipid, too dull, too boresome, alone makes me, as I told you just now, try to vary somewhat the turn of my poor sentences. Especially at certain times of the year, when nothing that one does succeeds; when artists and critics seem to be guilty of a crime in existing; when none of their efforts can either attract or excite the sympathies of the public, that public which seems to say: "What do all these people want of me? What demon possesses them? A new opera? To begin with, is there such a thing as a new opera? Is not this form worn threadbare, played out, pumped out? Can there be any novelty in it nowadays? Even should this not be so, what care I for the inventions of poets and musicians? What are the opinions of the critics to me? Let me snooze, good people, and go to sleep yourselves. We are bored, you bore us."

On such days, when you are imagining that critics are pre-occupied with malicious and bitter jests, the unfortunate fellows are really in the deepest dejection; twenty times do they take up their pen and twenty times does it fall from their hand, while they say to themselves in the bitterness of their heart: "Oh, why are we so far from Otaheite, and why has that charming island not remained in its pristine and semi-nude beauty, instead of its people dressing themselves up in canvas sacks and learning to sing the Bible with a nasal twang to old English tunes? We might at least go there to seek a refuge from European boredom, philosophize under the coconut-trees with the young Otaheite girls, fish for pearls, drink kava, dance the Pyrrhic, and seduce Queen Pomaré. In lieu of these innocent overseas distractions under the finest skies in the world, we have to go to the trouble of narrating how they set about in Paris the other day to make us labour out five mortal hours in a stuffy theatre!" For it is not merely a matter of listening to an opera in three acts (even the final rehearsal as well); of leaving half your dinner on the evening of the first performance so as not to miss a single note of the overture; of hearing unpleasant things said to you by his lordship your hall-porter for having tarried at the theatre till one in the morning, the hour at which *all* the actors were recalled and the last bouquet fell at the feet of the prima

donna. It is not merely a matter of spending part of the night running over in our minds the various incidents of the work, the form of the numbers, the names of the characters, dreaming of it if one falls asleep, and still pondering over it when one awakes. Alas, no, this is not all; we critics must in addition give an approximately intelligible account of what we have frequently not understood; make an amusing story of what has bored us; give the why and wherefore, the too much and too little, the strong and the weak points, the soft and the hard, of a work taken on the wing, a work that did not sit quietly for its would-be painters for as long as it would take to make a good photograph. As for myself, I confess I would rather write the whole opera than tell the story of a single act of it. For the author, whatever may be his grief at being compelled to make chaplets of cavatinas, and to remember so often that, once harnessed to the score of a Parisian opera, he must not amuse himself stringing beads, the author at least can work just when it suits him.

The narrator, on the contrary, condemned to criticism that has *to be done to time*, has to write precisely when he would rather not. He has had a bad night; he rises without being able to discover what his frame of mind is; moreover he says to himself: "At this very moment Halévy, Scribe, and Saint-Georges are enjoying the profound and restorative sleep of women who have been confined; and here am I with their child on my hands, obliged to wheedle its nurse into giving it the breast, to wash it, dress it up, tell everybody how pretty it is and how it resembles its fathers, to draw its horoscope and predict a long life for it."

I should very much like to know, my dear Corsino, what you would do, supposing that to these torments of theatrical criticism that of concert criticism were also added; that you had a crowd of talented men, remarkable virtuosi, and admirable composers to praise; that your friends came to you and said: "Here are nine violinists, eleven pianists, seven 'cellists, twenty singers, a symphony, two symphonies, a mystery, a mass, of which you have so far not said anything; come, speak of them at last. With fervour and enthusiasm! Make everybody happy! And take special care to vary your expressions! Do not say twice running: 'Sublime! inimitable! marvellous! incomparable!' Praise, but praise delicately; do not lay it on with a trowel. Make all of them believe that they are gods,

but no more; above all, do not say it too crudely; it might offend their modesty; we don't scratch a man with a curry-comb. You are dealing with excellent people who will be infinitely grateful to you for the truths you will be kind enough to tell them. Composers and artists no longer resemble the Archbishop of Granada.⁴ However great it may be imagined their self-esteem is, not one of them would nowadays be capable of saying, like the patron of *Gil Blas* to his too outspoken critic: 'Go to my treasurer and tell him to pay you five hundred ducats,' etc. The greater number of our celebrities would content themselves with repeating the witty saying of an Academician of the Empire, the modesty and depth of which cannot be too often held up to admiration. A banquet had been given to this Immortal. At dessert, a youthful enthusiast said to his right-hand neighbour: 'Let us propose a toast to M. D. J., who has surpassed Voltaire!' 'For shame!' retorted the neighbour, 'that is an exaggeration; let us content ourselves with the truth, and say: "to M. D. J., who has equalled Voltaire."' M. D. J. had overheard the suggestion; he grasped the hand of the contradictor warmly and said to him: 'Young man, I admire your blunt frankness!' This is how criticism is received in these days, and why it is now easy to exercise this sacred ministry. We know there are blunt-spoken Franks who would exercise it still better were the Archbishop's five hundred ducats added to the magnificent panegyric of the Academician; but these are far too exacting, and most of your colleagues content themselves with the gentle satisfaction that comes from the consciousness of a duty well performed; which at least proves that they have a conscience. Whereas, when one sees your obstinate silence, one asks oneself if you have one."

What would you say, Corsino, to people who might favour you with a homily of that kind? You would doubtless reply to them as I have done on such an occasion: "Friends, you are going too far. I have never given anyone the right to suspect me of a lack of conscience. I have one assuredly, even I, but it is very weak, very puny, very poorly, as the result of the ill-treatment it has to endure daily. At times it is confined, denied exercise and open air, condemned to silence; at other times it is forced to appear half

⁴ The Archbishop of Granada is one of the characters in Le Sage's *Gil Blas*. The prelate illustrates the truth of the French saying: "Never tell displeasing truths to the great." (Translator's note.)

naked in the public square, however cold the weather, and compelled to speak out, pretend to be courageous, face the unseemly remarks of idlers, the hoots of street urchins, and a thousand affronts. As could have easily been foreseen, the result is a ruined constitution, a phthisis already in its second stage, with blood-spitting, giddiness, an uneven temper, fits of tears, outbursts of rage, a persistent cough, in fact all the symptoms that herald an approaching end. But when dead, it will be embalmed according to the process employed by Ruisch to preserve the appearance of life in his daughter's corpse; I shall preserve it with care. It will be on view in my library, and then, upon my word, it will at least suffer no more."

CORSINO

My dear sir, permit me to point out to you that for the past quarter of an hour you have been beating the bush about the question. What is worse, you resort to irony to prove to me that the weapon of irony is a stranger to you. But I have my proofs, and if, after having set them forth, my colleagues do not say that I am triply right, I undertake to apologize most humbly to you in their presence, and to admit that I am a calumniator. Attention, all of you.

ANALYSIS OF "THE BEACON"

An Opera in Two Acts

*Thursday, 27 December 1849*⁵

The scene represents a square in the village of Pornic. Breton fishermen are about to go to sea with Valentin, the pilot. They sing in chorus:

Vive Valentin!

Tin! tin!

A lui la richesse,

⁵ Adolphe Adam's opera *Le Fanal* was produced in December 1849. Berlioz's article on it appeared in the *Journal des Débats* of the 27th December. (E. N.)

Un brillant butin!
Tin! tin!
Avec la richesse
On a la tendresse
D'un joli lutin!
Tin! tin!
Et l'on peut sans cesse
Vider pièce à pièce
Beaune ou Chambertin!
Tin! tin!

Just then the alarm gun is fired! boom! boom! flashes of lightning! ning! ning! set the whole horizon aflame! lame! lame! Valentin springs into his boat in order to try to board a ship in distress, telling his friend Martial to guard his light carefully, for should it go out, ship and pilot are doomed. Tremendous uproar, storm, prayer, etc., etc., etc.

I should be afraid of tiring out the reader were I to enter into further details regarding the music and words of the work; so I content myself with adding a word on the stage-setting. At the first performance, while they were thus singing down-stage, another drama was being enacted up-stage, and under the very eyes of the spectators, who, however, had little idea of it. The background representing a stormy sea, the waves had to heave and toss in their fury. Now, it must be explained that this perspective effect is produced by means of a painted canvas stretched horizontally, beneath which rise and droop alternately a number of small squatting boys, whose heads, raising the canvas, produce the crest of the wave. Can you imagine the torture of these poor little devils, compelled for an hour and a half to agitate this heavy sea by great efforts of their spinal column, never allowed to sit down, unable to stand upright, half smothered, and obliged to jump like monkeys without rest or let until the end of an endless act? The famous cage invented by Louis XI, in which the prisoners could not stretch their limbs, was nothing in comparison with this. Only the tritons of the Opéra, of whom there is a large number under their blue canvas, enjoy the comfort of a conversation, a privilege they often abuse. Witness the first performance of *Le Phare*, during which a terrific argument upset the Breton

sea to its very depths. The waves had at first talked together in a reasonable enough way, and had Neptune chosen to listen, he would have found no reason to hurl his *quos ego!* since he would have heard nothing but harmless exclamations, interrupted in the form of hiccups by the bobbing about of the unfortunate boys *a-waving* beneath the canvas; exclamations such as these:

"Look here, Moniquet, you are not working, and you make me bear every-ev-er-every bit of my corner of the sea; just stir yourself a bit and stand-and-and a trifle more!"—"You beastly rascal, I am huh-huh-huh worn out."—"Come, now, you shirker, put your back into it!"—"Do you think huh-huh-huh you are given fifteen sous to make a sea like the Seine? . . ."—"Well-ell-ell, if that you-you-youngster has an aptitude for the stage" (exclaims a huge wave which does not spare itself), "just stop thwarting hi-hi-his vocation, will you? After all, things are not going badly. Just listen to the applause; we have made a fine succ-success! If the house calls us before the curtain at the end, are we to app-ap-pear? Why, of co-our-se!"—"Not for me, I haven't the pluck. If you could only see how I am sweat-eat-ting; I am not presentable."—"Come, now, you aris-to-to-crat, do you imagine the public will mind that in the case of hartistes? I say, you other chaps, are you willing to show yourselves if-if-if you get a call?"—"No-o-o!"—"Yes-es-es!"—"Let's vote on it."—"No! Let us take a standing vote."—"Standing and sit-it-iting; here's an hour we've been voting like that, and I've had enough of it."—"Peter" (whispers a wave that has stopped working), "don't move, I'll not say a word about it."—"Don't worry, I'm not going to stir."—"Let's rest, the others can't see us. My back is breaking. Suppose we refresh ourselves with a pipe. Have you any tinder?"—"I daren't, for fear of fire."—"Rubbish! M. Ruggieri he makes fire enough, and yet this old hut isn't set on fire. Look out! Here's the thunder." . . . bzz. . . . (A fusee goes off without exploding.) "Hulloa, the thunder hasn't burst! What a lark! And this is what M. Ruggieri, who was in a huff with the manager, meant when he said the other day—I heard him—'Well, well, may the *mob* smash me, if I don't give it thunderclaps that will miss clapping every time.' He's kept his word, we get nothing but thunderclaps that don't clap. He's sparing his powder."—"That's true, but we are not getting any applause since we ceased working. We must get back to work, or

no recall for us.”—“Now, then, with a will!” Silence reigns among the Tritons, who labour conscientiously; the storm is superb, the seas bound like rams, and the waves like lambs (*sicut agni ovium*). Suddenly an angry wave, who had so far not said a word, rises to his full height, stands motionless, and exclaims: “Oh, how right he is, the citizen Proudhon, and were there in France a shadow of equality, those ruffianly bourgeois who look down on us from the height of the boxes in which they are strutting would be here kicking about instead of us, and it is we who would be looking at them from above.”—“But, you stupid ass,” retorts a wavelet, taking the big wave by the legs and overthrowing him, “you ought to see that that wouldn’t be any more Equality than this; it would simply be a seesaw inequality.”—“That’s not true.”—“He’s right.”—“He’s an aristo.”—“He’s a reac.”—“Let’s give him a good hiding.” Thereupon the storm becomes a fearful hurricane, a real tidal wave; the waves pile on top of one another with an unprecedented din, an unbelievable fury; it’s a waterspout, a cyclone. And the public admires this magnificent disturbance, the result of politics, and shouts its admiration of the Opéra machinists. Fortunately, the act being over, the curtain falls, and it is with great difficulty that an end is put to this seance of submarine representatives by rolling up the sea on a long pole.

“Oh! Oh!” exclaim the musicians in a fit of laughter, “is this what you call analysing an opera?”

“Patience, gentlemen,” resumes Corsino, “I will now give you something rather hotter. It is still our kindly critic who is speaking.

ANALYSIS OF “DILETTA”⁶

Opéra Comique in Three Acts

Monday, 22 July 1850

It is very sad to have to concern oneself about opéras comiques of a Monday, for the sole reason that Monday is the day after Sunday. Now on Sunday one goes to the Chemin de fer du Nord, enters a carriage, and says to it: “Take me to Enghien.” On getting

⁶ *Diletta* is probably Adolphe Adam's *Giralda*. (E. N.)

out of the obedient vehicle you come across some true friends, sound friends, the sort whose names you do not know, but who do not couple too insulting an epithet with yours when your back is turned and someone asks them who you are. And the conversation begins in the traditional form. "Hallo, is that you?"—"Pretty fit, and you?"—"I? oh, I am going to hire a boat and fish in the lake; and you?"—"Oh, I'm a poor fisherman, so I am going to vespers. I was at the Opéra-Comique yesterday; and you?"—"I'm virtuous, and for fear I shouldn't wake early enough to see the dawn rise today, I deprived myself yesterday of the performance you refer to. I have just heard a fat gentleman who was carrying a melon speak very well of it. What did you think of it?"—"I am careful not to speak evil of melons and lovers of comic operas; and you?"—No answer. The corner of a field of gooseberry-bushes has just been passed; you take one side, the friend has remained on the other; he eats gooseberries and no longer thinks of you. And you, do you bestow a single thought on him? Not a bit more.

This is real friendship, a sister of republican brotherhood! Enraptured with the freedom it leaves you, you cross the plain of Enghien afoot; silence reigns. A timid breeze would like to spring up, but dares not, and the leisurely sun gilds the motionless crops. Two cracked bells send their discordant notes from the top of the adjoining hill; it is the call to vespers at the Montmorency church. You stop, you listen, you look into the distance, towards the west, you think of America, of the new worlds springing up there, of the virgin solitudes, the vanished civilizations, the grandeurs and decadences of savage life. Then the east . . . recollections of Asia beset you; you muse of Homer, his heroes, Troy, Greece, Egypt, Memphis, the pyramids, the Court of the Pharaohs, the great temples of Isis, mysterious India, its sad inhabitants, decrepit China, and all those ancient mad or at least monomaniac peoples. We admire ourselves for not worshipping either Brahma or Vishnu and for the fact that we are going, as befits a good Christian, to vespers at Montmorency. A playful song-bird suddenly darts from a bush, rises perpendicularly, flinging skyward its joyous song, traces twenty capricious zigzags in the air, snaps up a gnat and carries it off, giving thanks to God, whose goodness, the bird says, extends over the whole of nature, since He does

not disdain to give food to the young of the birds —a naïve gratitude probably not shared by the gnat. This gives one a good deal to reflect upon, and so one reflects. Two young Parisian women, simply gowned in white, come along, walking with the consummate grace that only Parisian women possess. Four little feet well shod, well arched, well everything . . . four large, velvety eyes, well eyebrowed . . . in short . . . all this is food for still more reflection. They disappear in a wheat-field almost as tall, as straight, and as flexible as their waists are high, flexible, and straight. You reflect enormously, you reflect furiously. But the two discordant bells ring out a second and final call, and you say to yourself: "Nonsense! Let us go to vespers." A round hill is reached at last; picturesquely placed on its summit is a charming Gothic church, not too new, yet not too dilapidated, with a very beautiful stained-glass window; all around it is a not too worn grass-plot; it is plain that the vulgar herd seldom comes here. No filth, no obscene sketches, but just three words discreetly written in a corner: "*Lucien, Louise, for ever!*"

A troubled feeling invades you. This church out of a novel . . . its isolation . . . the peace surrounding it . . . the wonderful landscape unrolling itself at your feet . . . you feel stirring in you again your first love, so long dormant in the depths of your heart; your eighteenth year comes up again on the horizon. You seek in space a vanished form. . . . The organ plays; a simple melody reaches your ear through the church walls. You dry your right eye, and once more you say to yourself: "Nonsense! Let us go to vespers," and you enter the church.

Some thirty women and children in their Sunday clothes. The parish priest, the curate, the choristers in the choir. All sing out of tune enough to set up caries in the molars of a hippopotamus. The organist knows nothing of harmony; he intersperses all his phrases with little vermicular embroideries in a hideous style. Nevertheless you endure for a time the barbarous rendering of the psalm *In exitu Israel de Ægypto*, and the persistence of this melancholy psalmody in the minor mode, everlastingly recurring in each strophe, ends by dulling the suffering of your ears and brings back your reverie. This time it is dreams of art that absorb you. You say to yourself that it would be fine to have this charming church to yourself, where music might install itself with its sweetest

enchantments, where it might sing with so great happiness its hymns, its idylls, its love-poems; where it might pray, dream, evoke the past, weep and smile, and preserve its virginal pride from contact with the common herd, and live, for ever an angel and for ever pure, for itself and a few friends.

At this point the organist plays a little dance tune belonging to an old ballet of the Opéra, and the grotesque contrast it produces with the antique recitative of the choir so makes you lose all patience that you walk out. You are on the grass-plot once more; the murmur of voices from the holy shrine still reaches you. The organ continues its little eccentricities. You curse like a trooper. Two balloons go up in the distance; a column of smoke issues from a railway engine. Prose looks as though it was going to seize you. Quickly you draw a book from your pocket, and perceiving in the humble cemetery adjoining the church a tombstone inclined in a certain way, you find that you can stretch yourself comfortably on the tomb to read the twelfth book of the *Æneid* for the two-hundredth time. You are about to settle down there when you are stopped by sobs coming from the sunken road running along the cemetery. A little girl, leaning on crutches and carrying a basket in her hand, climbs up the hill, crying bitterly. You ask her: "What is the matter, little one?" . . . (No reply.) "Come, tell me what has happened to you?" (Her tears redouble.) "Should you like ten sous to buy gingerbread with?"—"Oh, a lot I care for your gingerbread!"—"But what have they done to you? Tell me, and don't be cross, don't abuse me; I am not mocking you, I am not from Paris, make yourself easy."—"Well, sir, my grandmother had told me that it would bring me luck, and that my leg would be cured the same day as hers, and I took such good care of her, and gave her so many flies in her basket!"—"What's that you say? Your grandmother ate flies?"—"No, but my swallow did. I hadn't told you . . . there . . . the swallow had entangled her leg in some horsehair and feathers, I don't know how, so that she had broken her leg, and then there was a big piece of mud from her nest that hung from the horsehair clinging to her foot, and prevented her from flying. I caught her a week ago, and grandmother said to me: 'Those birds bring luck, mind; you must take care of her, and if she is cured, you will also be cured, and you will be able to do without your crutches the same day.' I, who am so annoyed

at being crippled like this, I did what my grandmother told me; I gave her leg a good cleaning, and I put it in splints with matches. And all the time when she didn't feel any better, she stayed quietly in her basket and looked at me with her big eyes as if she knew me. I was always giving her nice flies, and I only pulled their heads off to prevent them from flying. And my grandmother kept on saying: 'That's right, you must be good to animals if you want to cure them. Only three or four days more and you will be cured yourself.' And just now she hears that flock of other swallows who are squalling up there round the steeple, and the little beggar pushes up the lid of her basket, and while I am busy preparing more flies for her, she (hee! hee!), she (boo-hoo!), she—she hooks it!"—"I can understand your grief, child; you loved your swallow so much."—"I loved her? What an idea! But she was not yet quite cured; and now I shall not be cured at all. The others whom she has gone to join will break her leg for her again, I know they will."—"Why do you think the others will ill-treat her?"—"Why, of course, because they are wicked, like all birds. I saw it all right this winter, when it was so cold; I had plucked the feathers from a sparrow that had been given me, leaving him only his wing and tail feathers, and then I let him loose before a dozen other sparrows. He flew towards his comrades, who all pounced on him and pecked him to death; when I tell you" (crying) "that I have never laughed so much—(hee-hee!) You can see that my leg will never be cured. A nice fix I am in now. Oh, if I had known (boo-hoo!), I should have wrung her neck in good style at once."

.

You put back into your pocket the book you were holding. Poetry is no longer seasonable. You feel furious. You light a cigar and stroll along smoking it, astounded and dismayed. You have hardly gone thirty paces when the little girl with the crutches hails you with a "I say, sir, what about the ten sous you promised me?"—"But you don't like gingerbread."—"No, but give me them all the same."—"I see I have only a five-sou piece; here you are." You toss the coin to her, she picks it up, waits till you have gone a few paces farther, and then shouts at you: "Hallo, you old villain! you aristocrat!" You smoke hurriedly, cross the plain once more, feeling like a fool; you enter the railway carriage to re-

turn to Paris, and you say to yourself: "Had she merely called me villain, or aristocrat—but old! . . . Bah! Never again will I go to vespers at Montmorency."

This is why I feel so little inclined, today, Monday, to talk to you about the new *opéra comique*. Yesterday's idyll has stupefied me. Tomorrow, then. . . . "Old villain!" . . . That's what she said.

She is only a child!

Tuesday, 23 July

It is always very sad to have to concern oneself about *opéras comiques* on a Tuesday, for the sole reason that Tuesday is the day after Monday. As the days follow each other without being alike, it is patent that if you have been melancholy on a Monday, you are likely to be fairly gay on a Tuesday. And there is no more fearful wet blanket, for one who analyses these works, than to have to analyse one of them—except, perhaps, for one who reads such things, the reading of that selfsame analysis. Now, I have not ceased laughing since this morning over an accident that occurred last Friday to M. Érard, and of which the whole of the Conservatoire quarter is still talking. It must, you will admit, be something prodigious to engross public attention for so long a time. It is indeed a prodigy of which I have to tell you, a prodigy fatal to a celebrated man, and which, nevertheless, I cannot but regard as most diverting. It is wicked of me, I admit. Has frequenting the children of Montmorency by any chance corrupted me already? . . .

And now for the fact in all its inexplicable and terrifying simplicity.

The Conservatoire competitions began last week. On the first day M. Auber, determined, as the saying goes, to take the bull by the horns, began with the piano classes. The intrepid jury summoned to hear the candidates learns without apparent agitation that they number thirty-one—eighteen women and thirteen men. The piece chosen for the competition is Mendelssohn's Concerto in G minor; so that, barring an apoplectic fit striking down one of the candidates during the seance, the concerto is going to be played thirty-one times running; you can see that for yourself. But what you perhaps cannot see as yet, and what I myself did not

know until a few hours ago, not having had the temerity to attend one of these affairs, is what I was told this morning by one of the Conservatoire attendants when I was crossing the courtyard of the institution, still worrying about the epithet of *old* bestowed on me by the Amaryllis of Montmorency.

"That poor M. Érard!" he said. "What a misfortune!"

"Érard, what has happened to him?"

"What, weren't you at the piano competition?"

"No indeed, so tell me what took place."

"Well, M. Érard had been so obliging as to lend us for that day a magnificent piano he had just finished, which he intended to send to London for the Universal Exhibition of 1851. That is as good as to say that he was satisfied with his work. It had a tremendous tone, a bass never heard heretofore; in a word, an extraordinary instrument. Its only fault was that the keyboard was a little hard, but that is why he had sent it to us. M. Érard is no fool, and he had said to himself: 'The thirty-one pupils, by pounding their concerto, will *liven up* the keys of my piano, and that can only improve it.' True, but the poor man did not foresee that his keyboard would be *livened up* in so terrible a fashion. When you think of it, a concerto played thirty-one times in succession on the same day! Who could imagine the result of so much repetition?"

"Well, the first pupil comes forward, and finding the piano somewhat hard, does not spare himself to get the tone out of it. The second, ditto. For the third the piano does not resist as much; the fifth it resists still less. I do not know how the sixth found it; just as he came on, I had to go out for a bottle of ether for one of the gentlemen of the jury who had fainted. When I returned, the seventh had finished, and I heard him say, as he was returning into the wings: 'This piano isn't as hard as they pretend; on the contrary, I find it excellent.' The next ten or twelve competitors were of the same opinion; the last-comers even declared that, far from being too hard to the touch, it was too soft.

"Towards a quarter to three we had come to No. 26 (we had begun at ten o'clock); it was the turn of Mademoiselle Hermance Lévy, who detests hard pianos. Conditions could not have been more favourable for her, since by that time everybody was complaining that the keyboard hardly needed touching to make it sound; and so she played the concerto so lightly that she won the

first prize outright. When I say outright, I am not quite accurate; she shared it with Mademoiselle Vidal and Mademoiselle Roux. These two young ladies also profited by the advantage offered them by the softness of the keyboard; a softness such that the keyboard moved if one merely breathed on it. Who ever saw a piano like that? Just as they were about to hear No. 29 I once more had to go in search of a doctor; another of our gentlemen of the jury had become very red in the face, and it was absolutely necessary to bleed him. A piano competition is no joke; when the doctor turned up, it was only just in time. As I was returning to the foyer of the theatre, I saw No. 29, young Planté, returning from the platform, very pale and trembling from head to foot; he said: 'I don't know what's wrong with the piano, but the keys move of their own accord; you would think there was someone inside it moving the hammers. I'm scared.'—'Come now, youngster, you're daft,' replied young Cohen, who is three years older than he. 'Let me pass. I'm not afraid!' Cohen (No. 30) comes on, sits down to the piano without glancing at the keyboard, plays his concerto very well, and after the final chord, just as he is leaving his seat, the piano begins the concerto again by itself! The poor youth had screwed up his courage; but after remaining petrified an instant he bolted as fast as his legs would carry him. From that time on, the piano, getting louder and louder every minute, goes its own gait, turning out scales, trills, arpeggios. The public, not seeing anyone at the instrument and hearing it make ten times the noise it did before, gets very excited; some laugh, others begin to be frightened; all are as astounded as you can imagine. One member of the jury alone, who could not see the platform from the back of his box, thought that Mr. Cohen had begun the concerto over again, and shouted at the top of his voice: 'Enough, enough, enough, be quiet! Send for No. 31, the last one.' We had to shout to him from the stage: 'No one is playing, sir; it's the piano, which has acquired the habit of Mendelssohn's concerto and is playing it on its own, according to an idea of its own. You can see for yourself.'—'But this is preposterous; send for M. Érard. Hurry up; perhaps he can master this awful instrument!' We go in quest of M. Érard. Meanwhile that brigand of a piano, having finished its concerto, began it all over again without losing a minute, and ever and ever with more row; you would have thought it was four dozen pianos

going at once, throwing out rockets, tremolos, runs of sixths and thirds in octaves, chords of ten notes, triple trills, a cascade of sound, the loud pedal, the devil and all his tricks.

"M. Érard arrives; do what he will, the piano, which no longer knows its own self, recognizes him no more. He sends for holy water and sprinkles the keyboard with it, but in vain; a proof that it wasn't witchcraft, but the natural effect of the thirty performances of the same concerto. They take the instrument down, detach the keyboard, which is still moving, and throw it into the middle of the courtyard of the Garde-meuble,⁷ and there the furious M. Érard has it chopped up with an ax. All very fine! What made matters worse than ever; each fragment danced, jumped, frisked about on its own, on the paving stones, between our legs, against the wall, in all directions, so much so that the locksmith of the Garde-meuble picked up an armful of this lunatic mechanism and flung into the fire of his forge to make an end of it. Poor M. Érard! Such a fine instrument! We were heart-broken! But what could we do? It was the only way to deliver us from it. Besides, how can a piano, after hearing a concerto played thirty times in succession in the same hall on the same day, help acquiring the habit of it? M. Mendelssohn won't be able to complain that his music isn't played! But look at the results!"

I will not add a word to the story we have just heard read, a story that has all the appearance of a fantastic tale. No doubt you won't believe a word of it; you will go so far as to say that it is absurd. Now, it is precisely because it is absurd that I believe it, for no Conservatoire attendant could have invented anything so extravagant.

And now to come to the principal object of this study. Let us not put off serious matters till the morrow; it is always very sad to have to concern oneself with comic operas on a Wednesday.

Diletta
 . but . . . very . . . the music . . .
 always . . . paleness . . . platitude.⁸

⁷ The warehouse where the furniture of the State is stored. (Translator's note.)

⁸ The manuscript of the author is here so illegible that not one of our foremen could read another word of it. We are therefore compelled to give in a somewhat incomplete form his criticism of the charming opera *Diletta*. (Note by the French publisher.)

All the musicians in chorus: "Frightful! Abominable! Corsino is right. It is inhuman to employ such cruel reticences. How can one do such a thing!"

"But, gentlemen, do listen to me. Do you know the operas I have thus struggled not to speak of?"

"No."

"No one here knows them?"

"No, no!"

"Well then, if it were proved to you that they are of a nullity, more absolute, more complete, than the work you are so superciliously permitting yourselves to perform this evening with only half an orchestra, would you still think me too severe?"

"Certainly not."

"That being so, I have won my case, and Corsino is wrong. For I formally declare that if the two scores are compared, your new opera is a masterpiece. Well, now! before judgment is pronounced in an arbitration case, both sides must be heard. However feeble my critical conscience may be, I have one, as I told you, and it is still alive. It would have died had I expressed a reasoned opinion, were it severe, pitiless even, on things of this sort, about which, from the point of view of art, there is nothing to be said, absolutely nothing. Your eagerness to condemn me distresses and wounds me. I had thought you entertained kindlier feelings towards me. Allow me to leave."

"Come, now," says Kleiner senior, trying to hold me back, "you mustn't let a little thing like that worry you. I have been much more—"

"No, farewell, gentlemen."

I leave in the middle of the third act.

NINETEENTH EVENING

"Don Giovanni" is being played



MAKE my appearance again in the orchestra after several days' absence. I had not intended going there that evening; but Corsino and some of his colleagues called on me to express their regret at having wounded my feelings by taxing my criticism with cruelty; I laughed, I was appeased, and followed them to the theatre. The musicians greet me with the utmost cordiality; they want to make me forget my displeasure, which they thought was real; but the moment the overture begins, they all cease talking. Mozart's masterpiece, worthily performed by both chorus and orchestra, is listened to devoutly.

At the end of the first act Bacon, fired with national pride, asks me: "What do you think of our baritone Don Giovanni?"

"I consider he deserves the Montyon prize."¹

"What's that?" he inquires, turning to Corsino.

CORSINO: "It's the prize for virtue."

BACON (*taken aback at first, then feeling greatly flattered, resumes with gentle satisfaction*): "Yes indeed, M.K. is truly an honest fellow!"

¹ Montyon, an enlightened philanthropist (1733-1820), was the founder of several prizes for virtue and literature, awarded yearly by the Institut. (Translator's note.)

TWENTIETH EVENING

Historical Gleanings.—Napoleon's Singular Susceptibility.—

His Musical Sagacity.—

*Napoleon and Lesueur.—Napoleon and the
Republic of San Marino*



N opera is being played, etc., etc., etc.

Everyone is talking. Corsino tells anecdotes. I turn up just as he is beginning the following one:

"On the 9th of February 1807 a grand concert was given at the Court of Napoleon. The gathering was brilliant; Crescentini was singing. At the appointed hour the Emperor is announced; he enters, takes his seat, and is presented with a program. After the overture he opens the program, reads it, and during the first song calls out aloud for Marshal Duroc, to whom he whispers a few words. The Marshal crosses the room, goes up to M. Grégoire, whose position of organizer of the Emperor's music obliged him to draw up the programs of concerts, and says to him in a severe tone: 'Monsieur Grégoire, the Emperor has commanded me to request you henceforth not to exercise your wit in your programs.'

"The unfortunate secretary is dumbfounded, not understanding what the Marshal means; he is afraid to raise his eyes. In the interval between the pieces of music everybody asks him in a low tone the cause of this blowing-up, and the wretched Grégoire, more and more upset, can only repeat again and again: 'I know no more than you do. I cannot understand it.' He expects to be dismissed the next day and is already laying in a store of courage to enable him to bear his disgrace, which seems to him unavoidable, although he is ignorant of the reason.

"The concert over, the Emperor, as he goes out, leaves the program on his arm-chair; Grégoire rushes to it, grasps it, and reads it five or six times without discovering anything reprehensible in it; he gives it to Messieurs Lesueur, Rigel, Kreutzer, and Baillet to read, but they also can find nothing in it but what is perfectly proper and quite harmless. The low jokes of the musicians are be-

ginning to rain on the unlucky secretary when a sudden inspiration supplies him with the key to the enigma and redoubles his fears. The program (hand-written according to custom) began with the words:

The Emperor's Music

Instead of ruling the usual simple line under them, some fancy or other of Grégoire's had induced him to draw a series of stars, increasing in size as far as the middle of the page, and decreasing to the other margin. Could anyone have imagined that Napoleon, then at the apogee of his glory, would see in this innocuous ornamentation an allusion to his past, present, and future fortune, an allusion as distasteful to him as it would have been insolent on the part of the prophet of evil who might have made it designedly, since it implied by means of the two imperceptible stars placed at the extremities of the line and the immoderate size of the star in the centre, that the Imperial star, till then so brilliant, was to decline by degrees, diminish, and be extinguished, following a line the reverse of that it had followed up to the present? Time has demonstrated only too well that it was to be so; but had the genius of the great man already revealed to him what was in store for him? This odd susceptibility might well make us think so.

"Here, gentlemen, is a copy of the program that nearly brought about the ruin of the worthy Master of the Music. Grégoire himself, when telling me of his adventure, made me a present of the original.

"I beg you to notice incidentally that the secretary of the Emperor's music did not know the spelling of *Guglielmi*.

MUSIC OF THE EMPEROR

* * * * *

GRAND CONCERT

French and Italian

*

Monday, 9 February 1807,

Overture to "The Twins"Guillelmi
1. Aria from "Romeo and Juliet"Zingarelli

Madame Duret

2. Aria from "Les Horaces" Cimarosa
3. Detached aria Crescentini

Madame Barilli

4. Duet from "Cléopâtre" Nazolini

Madame Barilli and M. Crescentini

5. Detached aria, with chorus Jadin

M. Lays

6. Duet from "La Cantatrice Villane" Fioravanti

Madame and M. Barilli

7. Grand Finale from "Le Roi Théodore à Venise" .. Paisiello

"It may well be imagined that Grégoire, who gradually lost the fear of being dismissed, took care, at succeeding concerts, not to ornament his programs with the slightest line or the tiniest symbolical vignette. It was as much as he dared to put the dots on the i's. His lesson had been too severe; he was scared of being witty *sans le savoir*.

"On another occasion Napoleon exhibited a feeling for music that he was perhaps not generally believed to possess. A concert had been arranged for the Tuileries' soirée; of the six numbers on the program, No. 3 was by Paisiello. At the rehearsal the singer of this aria finds himself indisposed and not in a condition to take part in the concert. It becomes necessary to substitute another aria by the same composer, the Emperor having always shown a marked preference for Paisiello's music. This being no easy matter, Grégoire conceives the idea of substituting an aria by Generali and boldly attributing it to Paisiello. Between ourselves, Mr. Secretary, you were taking a very great liberty; this was nothing more or less than a hoax on the Emperor. But perhaps this time you were showing audacity *sans le savoir*. However that may be, the illustrious dilettante, greatly to the surprise of the musicians, was not taken in by this bit of deception. Indeed, No. 3 has hardly been begun when the Emperor, making the usual sign with his hand, stops the concert.

" 'Monsieur Lesueur,' he exclaims, 'that piece is not by Paisiello.'

" 'I beg your Majesty's pardon; it is by him, is it not, Grégoire?'

" 'Yes, your Majesty, certainly.'

" 'Gentlemen, there is some mistake here, but be good enough to begin again.'

" 'At the end of twenty bars the Emperor interrupts the singer a second time: 'No, no, it is impossible, Paisiello has more talent than that.'

" 'Grégoire, humbled and out of countenance, says: 'It is doubtless a work of his youth, a first attempt.'

" 'Gentlemen,' Napoleon rejoins sharply, 'the first attempts of a great master like Paisiello have always the stamp of genius and are never below mediocrity, like the piece you have just made me listen to. . . .'

" 'We have had in France since that day many managers, directors, and patrons of the fine arts, but I doubt whether they have even shown this purity of taste in the musical matters with which, for the damnation of artists and composers, they have been connected. Many of them, on the contrary, have furnished numberless proofs of their aptness for taking music of Mozart and Beethoven to be that of Pucita and Gavaux, and vice versa.

" 'Yet, and there is no doubt about it, Napoleon did not understand music.'

MYSELF

Since we are telling stories about the great Emperor this evening, here is another one that shows how well he knew how to honour artists whose works appealed to him. Lesueur, whose name Corsino mentioned awhile ago, and who was for a long time superintendent of the Imperial Chapel, had just had his opera *Les Bardes* produced. The strange melodies, the antique colouring, and the solemn harmonies of Lesueur were there used in a way that justified them to perfection.

Napoleon's predilection for the poems of Macpherson (attributed to Ossian) is common knowledge; and the musician who had just given them a new life was therefore bound to reap his reward. At one of the early performances of *Les Bardes* the delighted Emperor summoned him to his box after the third act and

said to him: "Monsieur Lesueur, this is music entirely new to me, and very fine it is; your second act more especially is *unapproachable*."

Deeply touched by such approval and by the shouts and applause that came from every corner of the house, Lesueur was about to go away; but Napoleon, taking him by the hand, led him to the front of the box and, placing himself beside him, said: "No, no, remain; enjoy your triumph; it is one not often achieved."

Assuredly Napoleon, when thus doing him justice in so glorious a fashion, did not create an ungrateful subject; never did the admiration and the devotion of a soldier of the Imperial Guard surpass in fervour the worship the artist professed for him to the very end of his days. He could not speak of him with composure. I recollect that one day, as he was returning from the Académie, where he had heard the famous *Orientale* of Victor Hugo entitled "*Lui!*" bitterly criticized, he begged me to recite it to him. His agitation and his astonishment when listening to those beautiful lines are not to be described; at the following strophe:

*Qu'il est grand là surtout, quand, puissance brisée,
Des porte-clefs anglais misérable risée,
Au sacre du malheur il retrempe ses droits,
Tient au bruit de ses pas deux mondes en haleine,
Et mourant de l'exil, gêné dans Sainte-Hélène,
Manque d'air dans la cage où l'exposent les rois,*

he could bear it no longer; he asked me to stop; he was sobbing.

DIMSKY

Was it not for this opera that Napoleon sent Lesueur a gold box . . . with an inscription? . . . I have heard this said.

MYSELF

Yes, the costly box, which I have seen, bears the following epigraph:

THE EMPEROR OF THE FRENCH TO THE AUTHOR OF
"LES BARDES."

CORSINO

Enough to make any artist lose his head! What a man! That's simply grand! But how graciously delicate he could be on occasion, and how well he knew how to blend gentle banter with kindness! My brother, who served in the French Army during the first Italian campaign, has told me the manner in which he *recognized*, without a smile, the independence of the Republic of San Marino.

On seeing, perched on its rock, the capital of that *Free State*, he asked: "What is that village?"

"General, it is the Republic of San Marino."

"Ah! Well! Let no one trouble these good republicans. On the contrary, go and tell them from me that France *recognizes their independence* and begs them to accept two guns as a token of friendship, and that I wish them good-day."

TWENTY-FIRST EVENING

*Musical Studies. — Charity Children at St. Paul's Church in London;
a choir of 6,500 voices. —*

The Crystal Palace at seven o'clock in the morning. —

*The Chapel of the Emperor of Russia. — England's musical
institutions. —*

*The Chinese singers and instrumentalists in London; the Hindus;
the Highlander; the Blackamoors of the Streets*



HERE is being performed, etc., etc., etc.

On seeing me, four or five musicians interpellate me in regard to what I must have observed in England last year—the Charity Children, the Hindus, the Highlanders, the blackamoors singing in the streets, the Chinese of Albert Gate and those of the junk.

“None of us,” says Moran, “has ever been able to find any ear-witness of these musical eccentricities about which we have heard so much. We know you were in London in 1851, fulfilling, by order of the French Government, the duties of a jurymen at the Universal Exhibition; you must have seen and heard all these. Tell us the long and short of it; we are more than disposed to hear you.”

“Very kind of you, gentlemen, but it is a long story, and—”

“We have four acts tonight!”

“Four acts—”

“Without counting the ballet!”

“Lord help us! In that case I begin.

I was indeed in London during the first days of June last year, when a scrap of newspaper that had accidentally fallen into my hands informed me that the *Anniversary Meeting of the Charity Children* was going to take place in St. Paul's Church. I at once went in quest of a ticket, which, after many letters and applications, I ended by securing through the courtesy of Mr. Goss, chief organist of that cathedral. As early as ten o'clock in the morning the crowd blocked up the approaches to the church; I succeeded, not without trouble, in forcing my way through it. On arriving in the organ gallery reserved for the singers, men and boys, to the

number of seventy, I received a bass part, which I was requested to sing with them, and a surplice, which I had to don, so as not to destroy, by my black frock-coat, the harmony of the white garb of the other choristers. Thus disguised as a churchman, I waited for what I was to hear, with a certain vague emotion brought about by what I saw. Nine almost vertical amphitheatres, each having sixteen rows of benches, had been erected in the centre of the building, under the cupola, and under the eastern row of arches in front of the organ, for the children. The six of the cupola formed a sort of hexagonal circus, opening east and west only. From the latter opening started an inclined plane extending to the top of the principal entrance door; it was already crowded by an immense audience, which could thus, even from the most distant benches, hear and see everything perfectly. To the left of the gallery that we occupied, in front of the organ, a platform awaited seven or eight trumpeters and kettledrummers. On this platform a large mirror had been placed, so as to reflect, for the musicians, the movements of the precentor beating time in the distance, in a corner below the cupola, and dominating the entire choral mass. This mirror also served to guide the organist, whose back was turned to the choir. Banners placed all round the vast amphitheatre, of which the sixteenth row of benches almost reached to the capitals of the colonnade, indicated the places to be occupied by the various schools, and bore the name of the parishes or quarters of London to which they belonged.

Just as the groups of children filed in, the compartments of the amphitheatres, as they filled up successively from top to bottom, presented a unique scene, recalling the spectacle presented in the microscopic world by the phenomenon of crystallization. The needles of this crystal of human molecules, continually wending their way from the circumference to the centre, were of two colours, the dark-blue coats of the small boys on the upper benches, and the white gowns and caps of the little girls, who occupied the lower rows. Moreover, as the boys wore on their jackets some a plaque of polished copper, others a silver medal, their motions made the light reflected from these metallic ornaments glitter in such a way as to produce the effect of a thousand sparks being extinguished and relit at every instant on the dark background of the picture. The aspect of the platforms occupied by the girls was

still more curious; the green and pink ribbons adorning the head and neck of these little maids in white made this section of the amphitheatres look exactly like a mountain covered with snow, through which blades of grass and flowers thrust themselves here and there. Add to this the variegated tints melting in the distance in the light and shade of the inclined plane where the audience sat, the pulpit of the Archbishop of Canterbury, hung with red cloth, the richly ornamented benches of the Lord Mayor and the British aristocracy on the floor below the dome, then at the further end, high up, the gilded pipes of the great organ; imagine this magnificent church of St. Paul, the largest in the world after St. Peter's, framing the entire scene, and you will still have but a poor picture of this incomparable spectacle. And in all directions an orderliness, a quietude, a serenity, that increased its magic twofold. The most admirable stage-setting that could be imagined could never approach the reality, which, it seems to me now, I must have seen in a dream. As the children, dressed in their new clothes, gradually occupied their seats with a sober joy, without the least touch of turbulence about it, but in which some little pride could be discerned, I could hear my English neighbours say among themselves: "What a sight! What a sight!" and deep was my emotion when, the six thousand five hundred little singers being at last seated, the ceremony began.

Following a chord on the organ, there arose in a gigantic unison the first psalm sung by this extraordinary choir:

*All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.*

It is useless for me to attempt to give you an idea of the musical effect; the strength and beauty were to those of the best choirs you have ever heard as St. Paul's is to a village church, and then a hundredfold more. I must add that this broad and grand hymn is set to superb harmonies, with which the organ inundated it without ever submerging it. I was agreeably surprised to learn that the melody, which for a long time was attributed to Luther, is by Claude Goudimel, choir-master in Lyons in the sixteenth century.¹

¹More probably by Louis Bourgeois (1510-?). (E. N.)

In spite of the oppression and the tremors I was experiencing [I managed to control them sufficiently to be able to take a part in the "reading psalms," which the St. Paul's choir had to perform next. The *Te Deum* of Boyce (written in 1760), a characterless work, also sung by the choir, finally restored my serenity. In the Coronation Anthem the children joined the small organ choir from time to time, but only with solemn ejaculations such as "God save the King!" "Long live the King!" "May the King live for ever!" "Amen, hallelujah!" and again I was electrified. I began to count many pauses, in spite of the attentions of my neighbour, who was constantly pointing out to me in his part the bar we had reached, in the belief that I had lost my place. But when we came to the psalm in triple time by J. Ganthaumy, an old English master (1774), sung by all the voices to the accompaniment of trumpets, kettledrums, and organ, under the shattering effect of this glowing hymn, so grand in its harmony and of an expression as noble as touching, nature reasserted her right to be weak, and I had to make use of my music-copy, as Agamemnon did of his toga, to veil my face. Following this sublime piece, and while the Archbishop of Canterbury was delivering his sermon (which the distance prevented me hearing), one of the masters of ceremonies sought me out and led me, still in tears, to various places of the church, so that I might contemplate in all its aspects this picture, of which the eye could not, from any single point of vantage, take in all the grandeur. He then left me alone below, near the pulpit, among the fashionable world—that is to say, at the bottom of the crater of the vocal volcano—and when, for the final psalm, the eruption recommenced, I had to admit that here its power was twice as great as in any other part of the church. On leaving I met old Cramer, who, forgetting in his enthusiasm that he knows French to perfection, began shouting to me in Italian: "*Cosa stupenda! stupenda! la gloria dell'Inghilterra!*"

Then Duprez—oh! the great artist who, in the course of his brilliant career, moved the hearts of so many saw old debts owing him paid that day, and those debts, owed him by France, were paid to him by English children. I have never seen Duprez in such a state; he stammered, wept, and rambled, the while the Turkish Ambassador and a handsome young Hindu passed by us cold and

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sad, as if they had just heard their dancing dervishes howling in a mosque. O sons of the East, one sense is lacking in you! Will you ever acquire it? . . .

Now for a few technical particulars. This institution of the Charity Children was founded by George III in 1764. It is supported by the voluntary donations or subscriptions of the rich and ordinarily well-to-do classes of the capital. The profits derived from the annual Meeting in St. Paul's, tickets for which are sold at half a crown and half a guinea, belong to it also. Although all the seats reserved to the public on such an occasion are bespoken a long time ahead, the big space occupied by the children and the large part of the church that has to be sacrificed in order to make the admirable arrangements I have mentioned naturally diminish greatly the pecuniary results of the ceremony. Moreover the expenses are considerable; the erection of the nine amphitheatres and of the inclined gangway alone costs £450 (11,250 francs). The receipts generally amount to £800 (20,000 francs). Hence there remain at most but 8,750 francs for the six thousand five hundred poor youngsters who give such a festival to the metropolis; the voluntary donations, however, always amount to a considerable sum.

The children have no knowledge of music, and have never seen a note in their lives. They have to be taught by incessant repetition on the violin, for three whole months, of the hymns and anthems they are to sing at the Meeting. They thus learn them by heart, and consequently do not bring to the church with them either book or anything else to guide them in their singing, which is why they sing only in unison. Their voices are beautiful, but of little range; so they are given, in general, only phrases lying within the interval of an eleventh, from the lower B to the E of the fourth space (key of G). All these notes, which are virtually common to the soprano, mezzo-soprano, and contralto, and are consequently to be found in all the children, have a marvellous sonority. It is doubtful whether the children could be made to sing in several parts. In spite of the extreme simplicity and breadth of the melodies, to the musical ear there is anything but a faultless simultaneity in the attacks after the pauses. This comes from the fact that the children do not know the meaning of beats in a bar and do not dream of counting them. Besides, their one director, placed very high above

the choir, can be seen easily only by the higher ranks of the three amphitheatres facing him, and he is hardly of any other use than to indicate the commencement of the pieces, the greater number of the singers being unable to see him, while the others hardly ever deign to look in his direction.

The prodigious result of this unison is due, in my opinion, to two causes: to the enormous number and the quality of the voices in the first instance, and secondly to the arrangement of the singers in very high amphitheatres. The sounding-boards and the sound-producers are nicely balanced; the atmosphere of the church, assailed from so many points at one and the same time, in surface and depth, vibrates as a whole, and its resonance exerts a strength and a majesty of action on the human organization of which the most learned efforts of musical art under ordinary conditions have so far not given the slightest idea. I have to add, but conjecturally only, that in an exceptional circumstance like this there must occur many unfathomed phenomena, connected with the mysterious laws of electricity.

I now ask myself whether the cause of the notable difference that exists between the voices of the children educated by charity in London and those of our poor children in Paris might not be due to the good and abundant alimentation of the former, while that of the latter is insufficient and of poor quality. It is very probable. These English children are strong, with good muscles, and not in the least like the sickly and debilitated young of the working population in Paris, who are worn out by a bad alimentary regime, work, and privations. It is quite natural that the vocal organs of our children should participate in the weakness of the rest of the organism, and that even their intelligence should be affected by it.

At any rate it is not the voices alone that would be lacking to-day to reveal to Paris, in so astounding a fashion, the sublimity of *monumental music*. What would be lacking in the first place is the cathedral of gigantic proportions (the church of Notre-Dame itself would not be suitable); also, alas! faith in art, a direct and impassioned impulse towards art, the calm, patience, and subordination of pupils and artists, the strong determination, if not of the Government, at least of the wealthy classes, to attain the goal after having realized the beauty of it. And lastly it is money that would fail us, and the undertaking would crash from its

foundations. We have merely to recall, to compare a small thing with an immense one, the sad end of Choron, who, with slender resources, had already obtained such important results in the field of choral music, and who died of grief when, *for economy's sake*, the July Government suppressed his institution.

And yet, by means of three or four establishments that it would be easy to found in France, what would prevent us, after a certain number of years, from giving in Paris a specimen of the English musical festival on a small but perfected scale? We have not the church of St. Paul, it is true, but we have the Panthéon, which supplies, if not the dimensions, at least an almost similar internal structure. The number of the executants and of the audience would be less colossal; but the edifice being also less vast, the effects might still be most extraordinary.

Admitting that the inclined gangway starting from the top of the central door of the Panthéon could hold no more than an audience of five thousand, such a gathering would still be a quite respectable one, and, to my mind, would include about all the Paris population that possesses intelligence and a feeling for art. Let us next suppose that in lieu of six thousand five hundred ignorant children we had in the amphitheatres one thousand five hundred young *musicians*, five hundred musical women with real voices, and two thousand men singers sufficiently endowed by nature and education; suppose further that instead of allotting to the public the central space of the hexagon, under the cupola, we placed there a small orchestra of three or four hundred instrumentalists, and entrusted to that well-trained mass of four thousand three hundred musicians the performance of a beautiful work written in a style suitable to such means, on a subject in which grandeur is blended with nobility, in which vibrates the expression of all the elevated thoughts that can move the heart of man; I think that such a manifestation of the most powerful of the arts, aided by the enchantment of poetry and architecture, would be truly worthy of a nation like ours and would leave far behind it the vaunted festivals of antiquity.

With French resources only, such a festival would be possible within ten years; Paris would have only to will it. Meanwhile, and with the aid solely of the first rudiments of music, the English

will it and do it. A great nation, which possesses the instinct of great things! The soul of Shakspeare lives in it!

On leaving St. Paul's for the first time after witnessing this function, in a state of semi-intoxication, which you can now comprehend, I suffered myself to be led, without quite knowing why, to a Thames boat, where I was drenched for twenty minutes by a heavy shower of rain. Returning afoot, and soaked through, from Chelsea, where there was nothing for me to do, I tried to sleep; but the nights that succeed days like this know not sleep. I was all the time hearing the rumbling in my brain, the harmonious clamour of *All people that on earth do dwell*, and I saw the church of St. Paul eddying; I was again in its interior, which was now strangely transformed into a pandemonium; it was the stage-setting of Martin's famous painting; in lieu of the Archbishop in his pulpit, I saw Satan on his throne; in lieu of the thousands of worshippers and children grouped about him, hosts of demons and damned shot their fiery glances from the bosom of the visible darkness, and the iron amphitheatre in which these millions sat vibrated in its entirety in a terrible fashion, pouring out hideous harmonies the while.

In the end, weary of the continuity of these hallucinations, I made up my mind, although it was hardly day-break, to go out and stroll towards the palace of the Exhibition, whither my duties as juryman demanded me in a few hours. London was still asleep; none of the Sarahs, Marys, and Kates who wash the door-steps every morning were as yet astir, mop in hand. A gin-soaked old Irishwoman was squatting by herself in a corner of Manchester Square, smoking her pipe. Cows, lying in the thick grass of Hyde Park, were leisurely chewing the cud. The little three-masters, the toys of that nation of mariners, were swaying sleepily on the waters of the Serpentine. A few luminous rays were already beginning to come from the higher panes of the palace that is open to *all people that on earth do dwell*.

The sentry standing at the gates of this Louvre, accustomed to see me at all sorts of unearthly hours, let me pass, and I went in. The deserted interior of the Exhibition palace was a spectacle of an original grandeur, even at seven in the morning: the vast

solitude, the soft gleams of light falling from the transparent top, the silent fountains, the silent organs, the motionless trees, the harmonious display of rich products brought thither from all corners of the globe by a hundred rival nations. These ingenious works, the children of peace, these instruments of destruction recalling war, all these causes of movement and noise seemed, in the absence of man, to talk mysteriously among themselves in the unknown language heard by the *mind's ear*. I was preparing to listen to their secret dialogue, thinking myself alone in the palace; but there were three of us—a Chinaman, a sparrow, and myself. The slant eyes of the Asiatic had opened before the right time, it would seem; or perhaps, like mine, they had not closed. With a feather duster he was carefully dusting his beautiful china vases, his hideous grotesques, his lacquers, his silks. Next I saw him take a watering-pot, draw water from the basin of the glass fountain, and return to quench tenderly the thirst of a poor flower, no doubt a Chinese one, that was drooping in a mean European vase. After this he went and sat down a few steps from his shop, looked at the gongs hanging from it, and made a movement as if he were going to sound them; but reflecting that he had neither friends nor brothers to awaken, he let drop the hand holding the hammer and sighed. "*Dulces reminiscitur Argos*," I said to myself. Assuming my most courteous manner, I go up to him, and, presuming that he knows English, I wish him a "Good-morning, sir," that is full of a kindly interest which he could not mistake. By way of sole answer my man rises, turns his back on me, goes and opens a cupboard, and takes out some sandwiches, which he proceeds to munch without glancing at me, and with a certain air of contempt for this *barbarian* food. Then he sighs once more . . . he is evidently thinking of the succulent sharks' fins fried in castor oil to which he used to treat himself in his own country, the swallows'-nest soup, and the famous wood-louse jam they make so well in Canton. Ugh! The thoughts of this uncivil epicure give me nausea and I withdraw.

While passing close to a big 48 gun, cast in Seville, which seemed, when looking at Sax's shop adjoining it, to defy him to make a brass instrument of that bore and tone, I scare a sparrow hidden in the mouth of the Spanish monster. "Poor little survivor of the massacre of innocents, fear nothing, I am not going to tell on you;

quite the contrary, take this. . . ." And drawing from my pocket a bit of biscuit that the master of ceremonies of St. Paul's had forced me to accept the previous day, I crumble it on the floor. While the Exhibition palace was being built, a tribe of sparrows had taken up its residence in one of the big trees that now adorn the transept. It persisted in remaining there in spite of the threatening progress of the labours of the workmen. And indeed it was hardly possible for those birds to believe they could be captured in so large a glass cage, with its iron trellis. When they discovered that it could be done, great was their astonishment. They sought a way out, fluttering in every direction. It being feared that they might damage some of the delicate articles exhibited in the building, their destruction was resolved upon, and carried out with peashooters, twenty kinds of traps, and the deadly *nux vomica*. My sparrow, whose retreat I had thus discovered, and which I took care not to betray, was the sole survivor. He is, I said to myself, the Joas of his people;

"Et je le sauverai des fureurs d'Athalie."

("And I will save him from the wrath of Athalia.")

Just as I was uttering this remarkable line, improvised by me on the spot, a noise rather like that of rain spread through the huge galleries; it was caused by the fountains, which had just been set playing by their custodians. The castles of crystal and the artificial rocks vibrated with the gushing of their liquid pearls; the policemen, those excellent gendarmes without swords, whom all respect with such good cause, were going to their posts; the young pupil of M. Ducroquet was making his way to his master's organ, thinking out the new polka to which he was about to treat us; the ingenious manufacturers of Lyons had given the last touches to their admirable display; the diamonds, wisely hidden during the night, were once more sparkling in their showcases; the big Irish bell in D flat minor, enthroned in the east gallery, persisted in sounding one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight strokes, quite proud at not resembling its sister in the church in Albany Street, which gives out a major third. Silence had kept me awake, these noises made me drowsy; the need of sleep became irresistible; I seated myself in front of Érard's grand piano, that musical marvel of the Exhibition; I leaned on my elbow on its sumptuous lid, and

I was about to fall asleep, when Thalberg, patting me on the shoulder, said: "Eh, colleague, the jury is assembling. Come, show your energy, for today we have to examine thirty-two musical snuff-boxes, twenty-four accordions, and thirteen bombardons."

(The musicians, whom my narrative has apparently interested, remain silent and seem to expect me to continue.)

The only thing with which I can compare the effect of the gigantic unison of the children of St. Paul's is the beautiful religious *Harmonies* written by Bortniansky for the Imperial Russian Chapel, and given in St. Petersburg by the singers of the Court with a perfection of ensemble, a delicacy of shading, and a beauty of tone of which you cannot form any idea. But this, instead of being the result of the power of a mass of uncultivated voices, is an exceptional product of art; it is due to the excellence of the unremitting studies of a body of picked choristers.

The choir of the chapel of the Emperor of Russia, composed of eighty singers, men and boys, performing works in four, six, and eight real parts, now of a rather lively turn and complicated with all the artifices of the fugal style, again of a calm and seraphic expression and an extremely slow movement, demanding a rare poise of voice and art of *sostenuto*, appears to me superior to anything else of the kind existing in Europe. In it are to be found voices of a depth unknown in our country, descending to the counter-A below the staves in the F clef. To compare the choral execution of the Sixtine Chapel in Rome with that of these marvellous singers is to contrast the wretched little gang of fiddle-scrappers of a third-rate Italian theatre with the orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire.

The influence exercised by this choir and its music on nervous individuals is irresistible. Under these unheard-of effects of expression one is seized by almost painful spasmodic movements that are beyond one's control. I have on several occasions tried, by a violent effort of will-power, to remain calm, but without success.

The ritual of the Greek Christian Church forbidding the use of musical instruments and even the organ in the churches, the Russian choristers consequently sing without any accompaniment. Those of the Emperor have actually achieved the further feat of

dispensing with a conductor to beat time for them. H.I.H. the Grand Duchess of Leuchtenberg having one day done me the honour, in St. Petersburg, to invite me to hear a mass sung specially for me in the chapel of the Palace, I was able to form an opinion of the amazing assurance with which these choristers, thus left to their own devices, pass abruptly from one tonality to another and from a slow to a brisk tempo, and even execute recitatives and unbarred psalmody with an imperturbable ensemble. The eighty singers, in their rich costume, stood facing each other in two equal groups on either side of the altar. The basses were farthest from the centre; in front of them were the tenors, and in front of these again the soprano and contralto children. Motionless, with downcast eyes, they all waited in profound silence for the moment to begin, and at a sign doubtless made by one of the leading singers—imperceptible, however, to the spectator—and without anyone's having given the tone or indicated the tempo, they intoned one of Bortniansky's biggest *concertos for eight voices*. In this harmonic tissue there were complications of part-writing that seemed impossible, sighs, vague murmurs such as one sometimes hears in dreams, and from time to time accents that in their intensity resembled cries, gripping the heart unawares, oppressing the breast and suspending respiration. Then it all died away in an incommensurable, misty, celestial decrescendo; one would have said it was a choir of angels rising from the earth and gradually vanishing in the highest heaven. Happily the Grand Duchess did not say a word to me that day, for in the state of mind I was in at the end of the ceremony, it is probable that I might have seemed prodigiously foolish to Her Highness.

Bortniansky (Dimitri Stepanovitch), born in 1751 at Gloukoff, was forty-five years of age when, after a rather prolonged stay in Italy, he returned to St. Petersburg and was appointed director of the Imperial Chapel. The choir, which had been in existence from the time of the reign of Tsar Alexis Michailovitch, still left a good deal to be desired when Bortniansky took the direction of it. This able man, devoting himself wholly to his new task, made every effort to perfect this fine institution, and to attain this object he confined himself mostly to the composition of religious works. He set to music forty-five psalms in four and eight parts. We owe to him besides a Mass in three parts and a large number of

detached pieces. In all these works are to be found a true religious sentiment, frequently a kind of mysticism that plunges the hearer into a profound ecstasy, a rare skill in the grouping of vocal masses, a prodigious understanding of shades, a sonorous harmony, and, what is surprising, an incredible liberty in the conduct of the parts, a sovereign contempt for the rules respected by both his predecessors and his contemporaries, and especially by the Italians whose disciple he is supposed to be. He died on the 28th of September 1825, at the age of seventy-four years. After him the direction of the chapel was entrusted to Privy Councillor Lvoff, a man of exquisite taste and possessing a wide practical knowledge of the master-works of all schools. An intimate friend and one of the most sincere admirers of Bortniansky, he made it his duty to follow scrupulously the line traced by him. The Imperial Chapel had already attained a degree of remarkable splendour when in 1836, after the death of Councillor Lvoff, his son, General Alexis, was appointed its director.

The majority of quartet-lovers and the great violinists of the whole of Europe know this eminent musician, who is both virtuoso and composer. His talent as a violinist is remarkable, and his latest work, which I heard in St. Petersburg four years ago, the opera *Ondine*, the libretto of which has just been translated into French by M. de Saint-Georges, contains beauties of the highest order, fresh, lively, youthful, and of a charming originality. Ever since he has been director of the court choir, while following the path of his forerunners in what concerns the perfecting of the execution, he has applied himself to increasing the already rich repertory of that chapel, either by composing religious music of his own or by devoting himself to useful and learned investigations in the musical archives of the Russian Church, investigations thanks to which he has made several discoveries of value to musical history.

Choral music has carried us a long way, gentlemen, but I could not remain silent about so important a fact as the perfection of performance attained by the singers of the Emperor of Russia. Moreover, this reminiscence quite naturally came to my mind as the antithesis of that of the English children at St. Paul's.

And now, to come back to London, and before describing the music of the Chinese, Hindus, and Highlanders that I have heard, I must inform you that England (this is too little known on the

Continent) has during the last few years created certain establishments of great importance, in which music is not an object of speculation as in the theatres, but is cultivated on a grand scale, with care, talent, and real love. Such are the Sacred Harmonic Society and the London Sacred Harmonic Society in London, and the Philharmonics of Manchester and Liverpool. The two London societies, which give oratorios in the huge Exeter Hall, number nearly six hundred choristers. The voices of these singers are not of the finest, it is true, although they appeared to me far superior to Parisian voices properly so called; but from their ensemble there results an imposing and essentially musical effect, and, after all, these choristers are capable of performing correctly the complex and sometimes (from the point of view of intonation) dangerously tricky works of Handel and Mendelssohn—in other words, all that is most difficult in the way of choral singing. The orchestra accompanying them is insufficient in numbers only; considering the simple instrumentation of oratorios in general, it leaves little to be desired in other respects. I have heard that magnificent sacred poem *Elijah*, Mendelssohn's last work, given at Exeter Hall before two thousand deeply attentive listeners by this well-organized mass of amateurs, supported by a few professional artists. Between these institutions and those that have enabled our Parisian workmen to sing once a year, in public, some more or less wretched street ballads, there is an abyss. So far I am ignorant of the worth of the Liverpool Society. That of Manchester, directed at the present moment by Charles Hallé, that model pianist, that musician *sans peur et sans reproche*, is perhaps superior to the London societies, if impartial judges are to be believed. At all events the beauty of the voices there is very remarkable, the musical sense very keen, the orchestra large and well trained; and as to the fervour of the dilettanti, it is such that four hundred supernumerary subscribers pay half a guinea *for the right of purchasing* concert tickets on the very rare occasion when, through the absence or illness of some of the chartered members, it might be possible for them to secure some. Supported by such zeal, however great the expense may be, a musical institution is bound to prosper. Music makes herself beautiful and charming for those who love and respect her; she has nothing but disdain and contempt for those who sell her. That is why she is so bad-tempered, so insolent, and so foolish nowadays

in most of the great theatres of Europe that are given up to speculation, and where we see her so atrociously vilified.

Among the musical institutions of London I must also mention to you the old Philharmonic Society of Hanover Square, which has been too long famous for me to need to speak to you about it.

As to the New Philharmonic Society, recently founded at Exeter Hall, where it has had a brilliant career, you will understand that I must confine myself to a few simple statistical details, as in my capacity of conductor to that society it would ill become me to sing its praises. I will only say that the directors of the society have furnished me with the means of having masterpieces performed in noble style, and the possibility (almost unexampled up to the present in England) of obtaining a sufficient number of rehearsals. The orchestra and the choir together number two hundred and thirty, among them being the best English and foreign artists to be found in London. All of them supplement an incontestable talent by their fervour, zeal, and love of art, without which the most genuine talents very often produce only mediocre results.

There are also in London several quartet and chamber-music societies, the most flourishing one of which at present bears the title of the Musical Union. It was founded by Mr. Ella, a distinguished English artist, who directs it with a care, intelligence, and devotion beyond all praise. The object of the Musical Union is not solely the propagation of quartets, but that of all beautiful instrumental house-music, with the occasional addition of a song or two, almost always of the German school. Mr. Ella, although himself a talented violinist, is modest enough to content himself with being the organizing director of these concerts, without taking any part in them as executant. He prefers to associate with the most able virtuosi of London the foreigners of high renown who may be in London for the time, and thus it is that he has been able to unite with Messrs. Oury and Piatti this year Leonard, Vieuxtemps, Mademoiselle Clauss, Madame Pleyel, Sivory, and Bottesini. The public is well satisfied with a system that procures for it both an excellence of performance and a variety of style that would not be obtainable were the same virtuosi always to appear. Mr. Ella does not devote himself only to the execution of the masterpieces produced at his concerts; he also wishes the public to have a taste for and an

understanding of them. Consequently the program of every matinée, which is sent in advance to the subscribers, contains a synoptic analysis of the trios, quartets, and quintets to be performed; an analysis in general very well done, and addressing itself at one and the same time to both eye and mind by the insertion in the critical text of musical quotations in one or more staves, showing either the theme of each piece, or a figure that plays an important part in it, or the most remarkable harmonies or modulations occurring in it. Care and zeal could not be carried further. Mr. Ella has adopted as epigraph to his programs the following French words, the sound sense and the truth of which, unfortunately, are hardly appreciated in our own country; they are taken from the learned professor Baillot: "*Il ne suffit pas que l'artiste soit bien préparé pour le public; il faut aussi que le public le soit à ce qu'on va lui faire entendre.*" (It is not sufficient that the artist shall be well prepared for the public; the public must be equally prepared for what it is about to hear.)

O sad dramatic composers, if you possess both genius and heart, what can you expect from listeners who prepare themselves to hear your works by gorging themselves with truffles and champagne, and then go to the Opéra to digest them? Poor Baillot was dreaming. . . .

It remains for me to introduce to you the Beethoven Quartet Society, whose sole object is to produce Beethoven's quartets at short intervals. Each evening's program contains three of these; nothing less, and nothing else. Generally speaking, there is a quartet representing each of the three styles of the composer; and it is always the quartet of the third period (that of Beethoven's alleged incomprehensibility) that excites the most enthusiasm. You see English people following with the eye, in little diamond-type scores printed in London for the purpose, the capricious flight of the master's thought; which would go to prove that several of them are pretty nearly able to read the score. But I have been suspicious of the learning of these score-devourers since the day when, looking over the shoulder of one of them, I discovered that his eyes were glued to page four, whereas the players were already at page six. This amateur doubtless belonged to the school of that king of Spain whose mania it was to play the first violin in

the quintets of Boccherini, and who, always lagging behind the other performers, would say to them when the muddle became too serious: "Go ahead, I'll catch up with you!"

This interesting society, founded, unless I am mistaken, ten or twelve years ago by Mr. Alsager, an English amateur, whose end was tragic, is now directed by my fellow-countryman M. Scipion Rousselot, who has been settled in England a long time. An intellectual man of the world, a skilful 'cellist, a learned and ingenious composer, an artist in the highest acceptance of the word, M. Rousselot was more fitted than many others to make this enterprise a success. He has associated with himself three excellent virtuosi, all full of the zeal and admiration that inspire him for these extraordinary works. The first violin is the German Ernst, nothing less! Ernst, more captivating and more dramatic than ever. The second violin is Mr. Cooper, an English violinist whose playing is always irreproachable and of perfect clarity even in the most complicated passages. He does not, however, seek to shine unseasonably, as is the habit of many of his emulators, and he never gives his own part any more than the relative importance intended for it by the author. The viola is Mr. Hill, also an Englishman, one of the first viola-players in Europe, owning an incomparable instrument. The 'cello is in the safe hands of M. Rousselot. These four virtuosi have already given all the quartets of Beethoven twenty times; none the less they have long and meticulous rehearsals before each public performance. You will therefore readily understand that this quartet is one of the most perfect to be heard anywhere.

The meeting-place of the Beethoven Quartet Society bears the name of the Beethoven Room. For a while I occupied an apartment in the very same house. The concert-room, which can accommodate at most two hundred and fifty people, is consequently often hired for concerts intended to appeal to a small audience; there are many of this kind. Now, as the door of my apartment gave on the staircase leading to the concert-room, it was easy for me, by opening it, to hear everything that was being played there. One evening I hear Beethoven's trio in C minor. . . . I throw my door wide open. . . . Enter, enter, welcome, proud melody! . . . Heavens! how noble and beautiful it is! . . . Where, then, did Beethoven find those thousands of phrases, each of them more poetically

characterized than the others, and all different, all original, without even the family resemblance one recognizes in the melodies of great masters renowned for their fecundity? And what ingenious developments! What unexpected turns of thought! . . . How swiftly that indefatigable eagle flies! How he hovers and balances in his harmonious sky! He dives into it, loses himself in it, soars, descends again, disappears; then returns to his starting-place, his eye more brilliant, his wings stronger, intolerant of rest, quivering, athirst for the infinite. . . . A splendid performance. Who can have been playing the piano part like that? . . . My servant informs me that it is an Englishwoman. A genuine talent, upon my word! Gracious, what is that I hear? A grand prima-donna air? . . . John, shut the door, quick, quick. Oh, the wretched creature! I can still hear her. Close the second door, and the third, and the fourth if there is one. . . . I breathe at last. . . .

The songstress down below recalls to me one of my neighbours of the rue d'Aumale, in Paris. Having got into her head that she would become quite a *diva*, this lady worked as long as she had the strength to emit a sound, and she was very robust. One morning a milkwoman, passing under her windows on her way to the market, heard her piercing shrieks, and said with a sigh: "Ah, married life isn't all roses!" Towards the middle of the afternoon, passing the same way on her return home, the compassionate milkwoman hears again the outbursts of the tireless singer. "Heavens!" she exclaims, crossing herself, "poor woman! It's three o'clock, and she has been in labour since this morning!"

The transition will not be too abrupt now if I speak to you of the Chinese singers, about whose eccentric speciality you seem curious to know.

I wished to hear in the first place the famous Chinese woman, the Small-footed Lady, as the English placards and advertisements styled her. My interest in hearing her centred in the matter of the Chinese tonality and divisions of the scale; I was anxious to know whether, as so many people have said and written, they are different from ours. After the conclusive experiment I made, there is no truth in it, in my opinion. This is what I heard. The Chinese family, consisting of two women, two men, and two children, sat on a small stage in the drawing-room of the Chinese House, Albert Gate. The concert began with a song of ten or twelve couplets

sung by the *master of the music* to the accompaniment of a little instrument having four metal strings of the kind used for our guitars, which he played with a piece of leather or wood instead of the quill-plectrum used in Europe to pluck the strings of the mandolin. The neck of the instrument was divided into compartments marked by frets that drew closer and closer together as they neared the sounding drum, exactly as on the finger-board of our guitar. One of the last frets, owing to the maker's lack of skill, was badly set, and gave a tone rather too high, just as our guitars do when badly made. Still, this division of the neck none the less produced results entirely in accordance with those of our own scale. As regards the union of song and accompaniment, this was of such a nature that one had to conclude that this Chinaman at least had not the slightest notion of harmony. The air (grotesque and abominable from every standpoint) finished on the tonic, like the commonest of our romances, and never departed from either the tonality or the mode indicated at the beginning. The accompaniment consisted of a rhythmic design that was fairly lively and always the same, executed by the mandolin, and concurring hardly or not at all with the notes of the voice. The most atrocious part of it all was that the young woman, in order to increase the charm of this strange concert, and without taking the least account of what her learned master was doing, persisted in scratching blindly with her nails the strings of another instrument of the same kind as that of the singer during the whole duration of the piece. She was like a child who, being in a drawing-room where music is being played, amuses itself by striking at random the keyboard of a piano, without any idea of how to play it. To sum up, it was a song accompanied by a little instrumental charivari. As to the Chinaman's voice, nothing so strange had ever struck my ear; imagine a lot of nasal, guttural, moaning, hideous tones, which I might, without too greatly exaggerating, compare to the sounds that escape from a dog's throat when, after a long sleep, it stretches its limbs and yawns. None the less, the burlesque melody was quite perceptible, and at a pinch one might have transcribed it. Such was the first part of the concert.

In the second the parts were reversed; the young woman sang and her master accompanied her on the flute. This time the accompaniment did not produce any discordance; it simply followed

the song at the unison. The flute, somewhat similar to our own, differs from this only by its greater length, and by the embouchure, which is pierced almost in the centre of the tube instead of being, as with us, situated towards the top of the instrument. For the rest, its tone is rather sweet, fairly true—in other words, fairly false—and the player gave us nothing that does not appertain to our own tonal system and scale. The young woman was gifted with a voice that, compared with that of her master, was celestial. It was a mezzo-soprano, resembling in its timbre the contralto of a youth who is nearing adolescence and whose voice is about to break. She sang fairly well, always speaking comparatively. I thought I was listening to one of our provincial cooks singing “Peter, my friend Peter” while she washes her dishes. Her melody, the tonality of which was, I repeat, well defined, and contained neither quarter nor half-quarter tones, but only the most simple of our diatonic successions, seemed to me a little less extravagant than the ballad of the male singer, yet so outlandish and of a rhythm so impossible to grasp because of its oddity, that it would have been very difficult for me to record it exactly on paper had I had the notion of so doing. Let it be thoroughly understood that I do not take this *exhibition* as an example of the actual state of song in the Celestial Empire, in spite of the *quality* of the young woman, which, if the director of the troupe, who spoke English fairly well, is to be believed, was of the highest. The *cantatrices* of *quality* of Canton or Peking, who are content to sing in their own country and do not come to exhibit themselves in public in ours for a shilling, must, I presume, be as superior to this one as Countess Rossi² is superior to the Esmeraldas of the cross-roads. All the more so as the young lady was perhaps not so small-footed as she would have us believe; her foot—the distinctive mark of the women of the upper classes—might well be an ordinary foot and very plebeian, to judge from the care she took to let only the tip of it be seen.

Still I cannot help considering this test as decisive in regard to the division of the scale and the sense of tonality among the Chinese. But to give the name of *music* to what they produce by this sort of vocal and instrumental noise is, in my opinion, a strange abuse of the term. And now, gentlemen, pray listen to the

² I. e., Henriette Sontag. (E. N.)

description of the musical and dancing evenings given by the Chinese sailors on the junks they bring into the Thames; and believe me if you can.

At these affairs, after the first feeling of horror, which you cannot ward off, hilarity grows on you, and you laugh yourself all twisted and silly. I have seen English ladies end by swooning on the deck of the celestial ship, such is the irresistible power of that Oriental art. The orchestra is composed of a big gong, a small one, a pair of cymbals, a kind of wooden pan or big bowl set on a tripod and struck with a couple of drumsticks, a wind instrument, rather like a coco-nut, into which one merely breathes and which emits a howling hoo-hoo, and lastly a Chinese violin. But what a violin! It is a thick bamboo six inches long, into which is let a very thin wooden rod about a foot and a half long, very much like a hollow hammer, the handle of which would be fitted in near the top of the mallet instead of being in the centre. Two fine silken cords are stretched, it matters not how, from the upper end of the handle to the head of the mallet. Between these two cords, which are lightly twisted the one over the other, is the horsehair of a strange bow, which is thus compelled, when pushed or drawn, to make both strings vibrate simultaneously. The two strings are discordant with each other, and the sound they produce is hideous. None the less the Chinese Paganini, with a seriousness worthy of the success he meets with, resting the instrument on his knees, uses the fingers of his left hand on the upper part of the double string in order to vary the pitch, just as is done by 'cellists, but without observing any division relative to tones, semitones, or any interval whatever. He thus produces an endless series of grating sounds and feeble mews, which suggest the wails of the new-born offspring of a ghou! and a vampire.

In the *tutti* the hubbub of the gongs, cymbals, violin, and coco-nut is more or less furious according as the man with the bowl (who, by the way, would make an excellent kettledrummer) accelerates or slackens the roll of his drumsticks on the wooden instrument. Sometimes even, at a signal from this virtuoso, who fulfils at one and the same time the functions of conductor, kettledrummer, and singer, the orchestra stops for a moment and, after a brief silence, strikes a single smart blow. The violin alone continues its wailing. The song is transferred in succession from the

conductor to one of his musicians, in the form of a dialogue; these two men, employing a head-voice intermixed with a few chest or rather stomach notes, seem to be reciting some famous legend of their country. Perhaps they are singing a hymn to their god Buddha, whose fourteen-armed statue adorns the interior of the ship's saloon.

I shall not attempt to describe to you these jackal howls, these death-rattles of a dying man, these turkey cluckings, in the midst of which, in spite of the closest attention, I was able to discover only four *appreciable notes* (D, E, B, G). I will only say that the superiority of the small-footed lady and her music-master must be admitted. The singers of the Chinese House are clearly artists, while those of the junk are merely wretched amateurs. The dancing of these strange men is worthy of their music. Never have I witnessed such hideous contortions; you would think it was a horde of devils contorting themselves, grimacing, bounding, to the hissing of all kinds of reptiles, the bellowings of every species of monster, the metallic din of all the tridents and all the cauldrons of Hades. It will be difficult to convince me that the Chinese race is not insane.

There is not a town in the world, I am sure, where so much music is made as in London. It pursues you in the very streets, and the music made there is sometimes not the worst, several talented artists having made the discovery that the position of itinerant musician is incomparably *less hard and more lucrative* than that of an orchestra player in a theatre, whatever its standing. Playing in the street lasts only two or three hours a day, against eight or nine in the theatres. In the street you are out in the open air, you breathe, you shift your pitch, and you only play a little piece from time to time; at the theatre you have to endure a stifling atmosphere and the heat from the gas, remain seated, and play without ceasing, sometimes even during the *entr'actes*. At the theatre, moreover, a second-class musician earns hardly more than six pounds a month; the same musician, by launching his career in the public squares, is almost sure to take twice that amount in a month, and often more. Hence one can hear with actual pleasure, in the streets of London, small groups of good English musicians, as white as ourselves, but who have thought it wise, in order to attract attention, to blacken their faces. These sham Abyssinians accompany

themselves with a violin, a guitar, a tambourine, a couple of kettle-drums, and castanets. They sing little five-part airs, most pleasantly harmonious, quite melodious, and sometimes original in rhythm. They have also a verve, an animation, which shows that their task is not distasteful to them, and that they are happy. And shillings, not to say half-crowns, rain around them after each of their pieces. Along with these strolling bands of real musicians one willingly listens to a fine Scot garbed in the curious costume of the Highlands, who, accompanied by his two children, wearing like himself the plaid and the chequered kilt, plays on his bagpipe the favourite tune of the clan MacGregor. He too is exalted by the sound of his rustic instrument; and the more the pipes chirp, drone, squall, and frisk, the more swift, proud, and threatening do his and his children's motions become. One would think these Gaels were going to conquer England, just the three of them.

Next you see advancing, melancholy and drowsy, two poor Hindus from Calcutta with their once white turbans and once white robes. For sole orchestra they have two little drums shaped like kegs, such as one saw in dozens at the Exhibition. They carry the instrument suspended by a cord from the neck and resting on the stomach, and gently beat both sides of it with the extended fingers of both hands. The feeble noise resulting is rhythmized in a somewhat singular fashion, and, by its continuity, resembles the rapid click-clack of a mill. One of them sings to it, in some Indian dialect, a pretty little melody in E minor, with the range only of a sixth (from E to C), and so sad in spite of its brisk movement, so patient, so exiled, so enslaved, so disheartened, so sunless, that as you listen to it a fit of homesickness grips you. Here again there are neither third-tones, quarter-tones, nor half-quarter tones; and yet it is song.

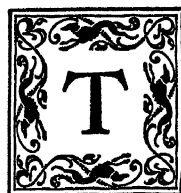
The music of the East Indians must none the less differ but little from that of the Chinese, if one is to judge from the instruments sent by India to the Universal Exhibition. I have examined, among those childish machines, mandolins with three or four strings, or even with only one, whose finger-board was partitioned by frets, as with the Chinese; some are small, others of excessive length. There were big drums and little drums, the sound of which differs little from that produced by tapping with your fingers on the crown of a hat, and a double-reed wind-instrument akin to our

oboe, whose tube, having no holes, produces only a single note. The leader of the musicians who accompanied to Paris, some years ago, the nautch-girls of Calcutta, used this primitive oboe. He would make an A hum for whole hours, and those *who love this note* got plenty of it for their money. The Exhibition's collection of Oriental instruments also contained traverse flutes, in all respects similar to that of the *music-master* of the *small-footed lady*; an enormous and rudely built trumpet, of a model differing only slightly from that of European trumpets; several bow-instruments, as stupidly abominable as the one used on the junk by the Chinese fiend whom I have mentioned to you; a sort of dulcimer, the strings of which, stretched over a long sounding-board, were struck with sticks; a ridiculous little ten- or twelve-stringed harp, whose strings, being attached to the body of the instrument *without keys* to stretch them, are, as a matter of course, constantly discordant with each other; and lastly a great wheel loaded with small gongs or tomtoms, the din of which, when the wheel is set in motion, possesses the same charm as that of the bells on the neck and head of a carrier's horse. There is an arsenal to excite admiration! To sum up, I have come to the conclusion that the Chinese and Indians would have a music similar to ours *if they had one*; but in this respect they are still plunged in the deepest darkness of barbarity and in a childish ignorance that hardly discloses a few vague and impotent instincts; moreover, Orientals give the name of *music* to what we call a *din*, and for them, as for the witches in Macbeth, *foul is fair*.

■

TWENTY-SECOND EVENING

Gluck's "Iphigenia in Tauris" is being given



THE entire orchestra, filled with a religious respect for this immortal work, seems to be afraid of not rising to the level of its task. I notice the profound and sustained attention of the musicians as they keep their eyes on the movements of their conductor, the precision of their attacks, their keen sense of the expressive accents, the discretion of their accompaniments, the variety they show in the matter of nuances.

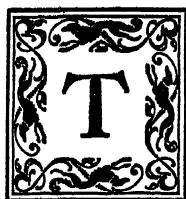
The chorus also is irreproachable. The scene of the Scythians, in the first act, excites the enthusiasm of the select public that fills the house. The Orestes is inadequate and almost ridiculous; Pylades bleats like a lamb. The Iphigenia alone is worthy of her role. When she comes to her aria "Oh, unfortunate Iphigenia!" of which the antique colouring, the solemn accent, the melody and accompaniment, so appropriately desolate in expression, recall the sublimities of Homer and the simple grandeur of the heroic ages, and fill the heart with the unfathomable sadness that the calling up of an illustrious past always evokes, Corsino, turning pale, ceases to play. He rests his elbows on his knees and buries his face in his hands, as if overweighted by an inexpressible emotion. Little by little I see his breathing become hurried and the blood rush to his reddened temples; and on the entrance of the women's chorus to the words "Let us mingle our plaintive cries with her wails," at the moment when this prolonged lament of the priestesses blends with the voice of the royal orphan and with the heart-rending tumult in the orchestra, two streams of tears force their way from his eyes and he sobs so vehemently that I find myself obliged to lead him out of the house.

We make our exit . . . I see him home. . . . Seated in his humble room, lit up by the moon alone, we remain for a long time motionless. . . . Corsino raises his eyes for an instant to the bust of Gluck standing on his piano. . . . We gaze at it. . . . The moon disappears. . . . He sighs painfully . . . flings himself on his bed . . . I leave . . . we have not uttered a single word.

TWENTY-THIRD EVENING

Gluck and the Conservatorians of Naples.—

A Witty Saying of Durante



HEY are performing etc., etc., etc.

The orchestra still appears to be under the spell of the emotions of the previous evening; no one is playing, and yet there is little talking. They are sunk in memories of the sublime. Corsino comes up and puts out his hand to me. "My poor friend," I say to him, "I was just like you. But the brutal insensibility of the public among which I have lived so long has crushed my heart; no longer does it possess the force of expansion of yours, and when the great expressive art moves you as it did last evening, I feel nothing but a cruel anguish. Fancy, dear friend, it so happened, hardly a couple of years ago, that I was conducting at a concert this very same scene of *Iphigenia*, and that while conducting in an ecstasy like yours I saw the members of the audience seated near the orchestra show signs of the deepest boredom; then I heard the singer, in despair at her non-success, curse the work and its composer; I had to endure the reproaches of a number of amateurs, and even distinguished artists, for having, as they said, *exhumed that rhapsody!!!* Set on the track of the truth by this hard and final test, I soon afterwards acquired the certainty of a fact nowadays evident; to wit: the public of three-quarters of Europe is today as inaccessible to musical emotion as the Chinese sailors. *We* have no surer means of knowing what pleases and what is distasteful to it than to examine what intoxicates and charms us, and vice versa. It blasphemes what we worship, and relishes what we . . . throw away.

And now admire the misfortune of the rules of harmony that Gluck has so daringly violated in the peroration of that aria of *Iphigenia*. It is precisely when the conflict of sound occurs that is absolutely prohibited by the theoreticians that the greatest and most dramatic effect is produced.

"In this connexion it is told that one day at Naples, where the

Clemenza di Tito,¹ from which this number is drawn, was being performed, the students of a conservatoire, who, as students, naturally detested Gluck, enchanted at finding in the aria this *faulty* sequence of harmonies, ran to their teacher Durante with the score of the *German donkey*, submitting it to his indignation without telling him the name of the composer. Durante examined the passage for a long time and then simply remarked: 'No rule, it is true, justifies this combination of sounds; but if it is a fault, I confess that it can have been committed only by a man of rare genius.'

DIMSKY: "Well spoken! Durante showed by this single remark that he was a true master and an honest man."

"It is all the more remarkable because none of his fellow-countrymen ever understood any of the masterpieces of that school. Moreover access to these masterpieces is denied them, for lack of singers capable of interpreting them in their true style."

"Are we entitled to be proud of our own?" resumes Corsino. "With the exception of Madame M., I fail to see which of last night's singers could have seemed endurable." (Turning towards me) "Have there ever been any in Paris actually worthy of their roles?"

"Yes, Dérivis senior, who was no singer, but could make one understand the Orestes of Gluck; Madame Branchu was an incomparable Iphigenia, and Adolphe Nourrit has very often electrified me in the part of Pylades. The laughable softness of your pastoral tenor cannot have given you any idea of the heroic exaltation of the aria 'Divinity of great souls,' in which Nourrit has never been equalled."

"Yes indeed, we had to guess a good many things, it is true, but what is there harder than to perform such works well? . . . And yet the effect produced by our Iphigenia cannot be ascribed to the scenery and stage-setting."

"Assuredly not," exclaim several of the musicians, "since this time the stinginess of our theatre, which always makes itself manifest where ancient masterpieces are concerned, has been carried to the point of impropriety, even cynicism!"

¹ Gluck's early opera of that title. (E. N.)

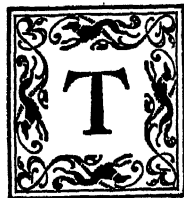
"What is the cost of the scenery of the vile thing presented this evening?"

"Four thousand thalers!"

"Very good. Let ugly women enjoy the luxury of attire. Nudity suits goddesses alone."

TWENTY-FOURTH EVENING

"The Huguenots" is being performed



THE musicians take good care not to read or speak. "Another musical evening," I say to my neighbours during an *entr'acte*; "it will be the last one for me; I am returning to Paris."
"What, already?"

"In three days."

"Then, since the theatre is to be closed the day after tomorrow *for repairs*, we must all dine together."

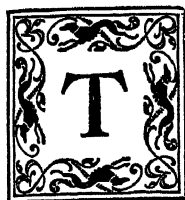
"Willingly, but since tomorrow, to make up for it, the theatre is open and will favour us with the long and stringy opera recently imported from Italy, our friend Corsino will be kind enough to close our literary evenings by reading us a novel he has just finished, and of which I have indiscreetly read a few pages at his home."

"That's settled."

"Hush! Let us listen to this prodigious chorus, and the equally prodigious duet!"

TWENTY-FIFTH EVENING

Euphonia, or the Musical Town, A Novel of the Future



HEY are playing etc., etc., etc.

Hardly have the first chords of the opera been sounded when Corsino unrolls his manuscript and reads what follows to an accompaniment of trombones and big drum. We can nevertheless hear him, owing to the strength and the singular timbre of his voice.

"Gentlemen," he says, "this is a novel of the *future*. The scene, with your permission, *will take place* in 2344."

EUPHONIA

or The Musical Town

*

CHARACTERS

XILEF, a composer, prefect of voices and string-instruments
in the town of Euphonia

SHETLAND, a composer, prefect of the wind-instruments

MINA, celebrated Danish *cantatrice*

MADAME HAPPER, her mother

FANNY, her maid

FIRST LETTER

Sicily, 7 June 2344

Xilef to Shetland

I have just taken a bath in Etna! Oh, my dear Shetland, what a delectable hour I have spent in ploughing through the waters

of that cool, calm, and pure lake! Its basin is immense, but its circular shape and the steepness of its banks make its surface so sonorous that my voice can reach without difficulty from its centre to the most distant parts of its shore. I became aware of this fact on hearing the applause of some Sicilian ladies who were promenading in a balloon more than half a league from the place where I was gambolling like a merry dolphin. I had just sung, while swimming, a melody I have composed this very morning to a poem in old French by Lamartine, which the aspect of the locality in which I now am had recalled to my memory. The verses enrapture me. You can form your opinion of them; Enner has promised me to translate "*Le Lac*" into German.

Why are you not here? We would go riding together; I feel full of verdant youth, strength, intelligence, and joy. Nature is so beautiful around me! The plain wherein Messina stood is an enchanted garden; flowers everywhere; orange-groves; palm-trees inclining their graceful heads. It is the fragrant crown of this divine crater, at the bottom of which dreams today the lake that has subdued the fires of Etna. Strange and terrible must the struggle have been! What a spectacle! The earth quaking in horrible convulsions, the huge mountain sinking on itself, the snows, the flames, the seething lava, the explosions, the cries, the death-rattle of the volcano in its agony, the ironical hissing of the waters rushing in from a thousand subterranean springs, pursuing their enemy, gripping it, closing in on it, smothering and killing it, then suddenly becoming calm, ready to smile at the slightest breath of wind. Well, now, would you believe that this locality that was once so terrible and is today so enchanting is almost deserted? The Italians hardly know of it; nowhere is it spoken of; mercantile preoccupations so engross the inhabitants of this beautiful region that they are interested in nature's magnificent spectacles only in so far as they can perceive the bearing they have on the industrial questions that move them by night and by day. This is why Etna is to the Italians merely a big hole filled with stagnant water, and that cannot be put to any use. From one end to the other of the soil formerly so rich in poets, painters, and musicians, which was after Greece, the second great temple of art, where the people themselves had the sense of it, where eminent artists were honoured almost as much as they are today in northern Europe—in

a word, nothing is seen in all Italy but factories, workshops, looms, markets, warehouses, workers of every sex and age, consumed with the thirst for gold and the fever of cupidity, hurried masses of merchants and speculators; from top to bottom of the social scale nothing is heard but the noise of money; the talk is all of woollens and cottons and colonial produce; in the public squares are men provided with telescopes and field-glasses for observing the arrival of carrier-pigeons or aerial ships.

France, the land of indifference and raillery, is, compared to modern Italy, the land of the arts. And it is there that our Minister of Choruses conceived the idea of sending me to find singers! Oh, everlasting prejudice! We too must be strangely absorbed in our personality to be so ignorant of the barbarescent manners of the land where *the orange-tree still blooms*, but where art, long since defunct, has not left even a remembrance.

I have none the less accomplished my mission; I have sought voices and have found a great number. But oh, what organizations, what mentalities! Nothing will astonish me after this. When, addressing a young woman whom, from the sonority of her speech, I suspected to be gifted with a remarkable vocal apparatus, I asked her to sing, I got for reply: "Sing! Why? How much are you going to give me? For how many minutes? You offer me too little; I haven't the time." Did I discover others less eager to let me hear a few notes, the voices were often powerful and of admirable timbre, but uncultured to an astounding degree, without the least sense of rhythm or tonality. One day, accompanying a woman who had commenced an aria in E flat, at the recurrence of the theme I suddenly modulated into D, and, without the least surprise at the change, the young barbarian continued singing in the original key. In the case of the men it is much worse; they shout with all the strength of their voices. If they possess one note more sonorous than the rest, they try, when it presents itself in the melody, to prolong it as much as possible; they dwell on it, delight in it, inflate it, swell it out in an abominable fashion; one fancies one is listening to the sinister howls of a melancholy wolf. And these horrors merely represent the moderate exaggeration of the vocal artists; these shout a little less badly, that's all. Still, it is from Italy that, five hundred years ago, there came to us such singers as Rubini, Persiani, Tacchinardi, Crivelli, Pasta,

he assembles the singers to submit to them the scenario of the piece, and to come to an understanding with them as to the costumes they are to wear. The costumes are really the principal thing for the singers, since it is the only one which momentarily attracts to them the attention of the public on the day of the first performance. Hence, in days gone by, terrible discussions arose between the vocal virtuosi and the directors. (The authors are never invited to these seances, nor consulted with regard to the discussions. One buys a libretto of them just as one does a patty, which one is free to eat or throw to the dogs after having paid for it.) But nowadays managers have become more reasonable; they no longer worry about the exactness of the costumes; they have felt that it was not worth while displeasing the artists for so little; and their task is nowadays confined to satisfying all of them on that point, which is no easy matter. So when the scenario is being read, they just learn what kind of costume the actor will choose, and see to it that no two among them intend to dress in the same way, for a coincidence of that kind often leads to indescribable outbursts of temper; it is then that the impresario's position becomes embarrassing. Thus in the new opera *Il re Murate*, Cretionne, who was cast for the part of Napoleon, wanted to copy an antique statue and appear in the cuirass of Pompey, an ancient general who lived more than three hundred years before Napoleon and was killed by a cannon-ball at the battle of Pharsala. (You see that my poor *operatore* is as weak in ancient history as he is in music.)

But it so happened that Caponetti, who plays Murat, had the same idea, and it would have been impossible to get either of them to give way had not Luciola, our prima donna, suggested a big bearskin with a white plum for Napoleon, and a blue turban with a cross of diamonds for Murat. This head-gear satisfied our virtuosi and seemed in their eyes to establish between them a sufficiently notable difference to allow both to wear the Roman cuirass; had it not been for this, the opera would not have been performed.

Once the great question of costume at an end, one goes on to that of the vocal numbers. Now comes a very hard task for the *operatore*, I can assure you, and one most humiliating to him if he possesses any knowledge of music and a little self-esteem.

The ladies and gentlemen examine the extent and texture of the melodies, and after a cursory inspection one of them says: "I will not sing my phrase of the trio in F; it is not brilliant enough. *Operatore*, you must transpose it into F sharp for me."—"But, sir, this is a trio, and since the other two voices have to remain in the original key, how can it be done?"—"Do as you please, modulate before and after, add a few bars, just do as you like, but I insist on singing this theme in F sharp."—"This melody is not to my liking," says the prima donna; "I must have another."—"Signora, it is the theme of the ensemble, and since all the voices take it up in succession after yourself, you must needs deign to sing it."—"What's that? *Must!* What impertinence! You must give me another, and at once. That's where the *must* comes in. Just do what you have to do, and no arguing, please."—"Hum! hum! *tromba! tromba! già ribomba la tromba,*" shouts the basso on the upper D. "Oh dear, my D is not as strong as it was since my recent illness; I must let it have time to come back to me. *Operatore*, you will have to take out all these notes for me; I won't have any D's in my roles until the month of September; you must put C's and B's in their stead."—"I say, Facchino," growls the baritone, "are you desirous of receiving the application of the tip of my boot in a certain part of your anatomy? I notice that you have forgotten my E flat, which appears only twenty times in my aria; pray do me the pleasure of adding at least two E flats in every bar, as I don't want to lose my reputation."—"And yet," resumes the unfortunate *operatore*, "there are some very pretty passages in my music, I venture to say. Just see how they have ruined my prayer, than which I have never written anything better!"

I take a look at—*his music*. . . . Conceive my amazement on recognizing the beautiful prayer in Rossini's *Moïse*, which we occasionally play of an evening in the garden of Euphonia with so majestic an effect. The old master of Pesaro, who, it is said, held his compositions in such slight esteem, would have given proof of a rare philosophy, or rather of a culpable indifference in the matter of art, had he been able to foresee without indignation the grotesque monstrosity one of his finest inspirations would become some day! In the first place, the simple and vibrant modulation from G minor into B flat major, which gives such splendour to the development of the second phrase, has been changed to the

horribly dry and hard modulation from G minor into B natural major; next, in lieu of Rossini's harp accompaniment, they have had the notion of inserting a flute variation, overloaded with ridiculous turns and embroideries; and lastly, at the final resumption of the theme in G major, they have seen fit to substitute—what do you think? Guess, if you can, and tell me if you dare!—the refrain of the French national anthem: "*Aux armes, citoyens!*" accompanied by a dozen side-drums and four big drums!!

It is a proved fact that this old Rossini, who was certainly not lacking in ideas, did not neglect an opportunity, when one came his way, of taking possession of those of others, when fate so willed it that a happy melody fell to the lot of some ruffian or other; he even made no fuss about admitting it, and went so far as to mock the man he was despoiling. "*E troppo buono per questo coglione* (It's too good for that blackguard)!" he would remark, and he would in this way make a charming or magnificent piece, according to the nature of the ruffian's idea. So many cannons (no pun intended!) taken from the enemy, with which, like the great Emperor, he erected his column! Today, alas, the column is broken, and out of its fragments, whereof we gather a few with so great a respect, the Italians make kitchen utensils and ignoble caricatures.

Thus do certain glories pass over the very peoples whom they have warmed with their most burning rays! We Euphonians, it is true, preserve all those that art has solemnly consecrated; but we are not *the people* in the high acceptance of the term; we even constitute, it must be confessed, a very small fragment of the people lost amid the mass of civilized nations. Glory is a sun that lights up in succession certain points of our paltry sphere, but which, while travelling through space, covers a circle of such immensity that the most profound science could not foretell with certainty the time of its return to the places it has forsaken. So again, to borrow from nature another comparison, is it with the great seas and their mysterious evolutions. If, as has been proved, the continents in which our sad humanity struggles at the present time were formerly submerged, may we not conclude from this that the mountains, valleys, and plains over which the sombre billows of the old ocean have rolled for so many centuries were at one

time covered with a flourishing vegetation, which afforded bed and shelter to millions of living and perhaps even intelligent beings? When will it be our turn to be at the bottom of the abyss?

And on the day that this immense catastrophe is accomplished, will there exist any glory or power, fire of genius or of love, strength or beauty, that will not be extinguished? . . . What matters all? . . .

Pardon me, dear Shetland, this geological digression and this fit of philosophic discouragement. . . . I am suffering, afraid, expectant; I flush, my heart beats, I scan all the points of space; the mail-balloon is not in sight, and yesterday's did not bring me anything. No news from Mina! What has happened to her? Is she ill, or dead, or unfaithful? . . . I love her so distressingly. We suffer so much, we children of the art with flaming wings, we, raised on its burning bosom; we whose poetized passions ruthlessly plough heart and brain to sow inspiration, that rough seed that will lacerate them once more when its germs develop! We die so many deaths before the last one! Shetland, I love her. I love her as you yourself would, could you feel a love other than the one you have confessed to me. And yet, in spite of the grandeur and the splendour of her talent, Mina often appears to me a common organization. Shall I confess it to you? She prefers ornate song to the great outpourings of the soul; she knows not reverie; one day she heard in Paris your first symphony from beginning to end, without shedding a tear; she thinks Beethoven's *adagios* too long!

Oh, female of man!!!

On the day she avowed it to me I felt a sharp icicle pierce my heart. Nay, more! A Dane, born at Elsinore, she owns a villa built on the old site and *with the sacred fragments of Hamlet's castle*; and she sees nothing extraordinary in it, and pronounces the name of Shakspeare without emotion; to her he is merely a poet like so many others. She laughs, laughs, the unfortunate creature, over Ophelia's songs, which she considers most *improper*, and nothing else.

Oh, female of monkey!!!

Forgive me, dear friend; yes, it is indeed infamous, but in spite of all, I love her, I love her, to the point of saying with Othello, whom I should imitate were she to deceive me: "Her jesses are

my dearest heart-strings." Glory and art may perish! She is everything to me, I love her. . . .

I can see her with her undulating walk, her large, sparkling eyes, her goddess-like air; I hear her Ariel voice, agile, silvern, penetrating. I seem to be beside her, speaking to her in her Scandinavian dialect: "*Mina, sare disiul dolle menos? Doer si men? Doer? Vare, Mina, vare, vare!*" Then, with her head resting on my shoulder, we gently murmur our most intimate secrets, speak of earlier days, and of you.

She greatly desires to know you; she would like to go to Euphonia for that reason alone. She has heard so much about your astounding compositions. She has made for herself a rather strange portrait of you, one that luckily does not resemble you. I recollect the interest with which, previous to my departure from Paris, she collected every echo of your recent triumphs. One day when I was chaffing her about it and she made a remark about my jealous humour, I replied: "I jealous of Shetland, oh dear, no! I have nothing to fear; he will never love you; his heart is overflowing with a too masterful love, which would have to be extinguished first, and that would be impossible." Mina closed her eyes and was silent; a moment later she opened them, more beautiful than ever, and replied, kissing me: "It is I who will never love him. As to him, if I wanted to, sir, I might perhaps prove to you. . . ." She was so beautiful at the moment that, I admit, I felt happy, in spite of the tried constancy of my friend Shetland, in the knowledge that he was three hundred leagues away from us, engrossed with trombones, flutes, and saxophones. You will not bear me any ill will for my frankness, will you?

Alas, I am alone, and after so many solemn affirmations, so many sworn promises not to let a week go by without writing to me, not a line has come to me from Mina!

I have just seen another mail-balloon descending . . . I run. . . . Nothing!

You are almost happy, you. You suffer, it is true, but the one you love no longer exists. Jealousy troubles you not; you neither hope nor fear; you are free and great. Your love is brother to art; it calls forth inspiration; your life is expansive; you are radiant. I—oh, do not let us speak of ourselves or of them. A curse on all beautiful women—who are not ours!

I will try to resume the sketch I had begun of Italy's musical manners. It is not a question here of passion, imagination, heart, soul, or mind, but of commonplace realities. I therefore continue.

In all the theatres there is in front of the stage a black hollow filled with wretches blowing and scraping, as indifferent to what is being shouted on the stage as to what is being buzzed in the boxes and parterre, and possessed of but one thought, that of earning their supper. The assemblage of these poor creatures constitutes what is called an orchestra, and this is how an orchestra is generally composed: there are usually two first and two second violins, very rarely a viola and a 'cello, almost always two or three double-basses; and the men who play them, for a few coins handed to them at the end of the evening, are greatly embarrassed when they have to play something in which they cannot use their three open strings; in B major, for instance, where the three natural notes G, D, and A do not figure. (They have retained the three-stringed double-basses tuned in fifths.)

This formidable battalion of string-instruments has for opponents a dozen keyed bugles, six cornets-à-pistons, six valve trombones, two tenor tubas, two bass tubas, three ophicleides, a horn, three piccolos, three small clarinets in E flat, two clarinets in C, three bass clarinets for *lively tunes*, and an organ for *ballet music*. Let us not forget four big drums, six side-drums, and two gongs. There are no longer any oboes, bassoons, harps, kettledrums, or cymbals, these instruments having been consigned to the deepest oblivion. The reason is obvious: the sole object of the orchestra being to produce a noise capable of drowning from time to time the talking in the theatre, the small clarinets and piccolos emit sounds far shriller than oboes can; ophicleides and tubas are far preferable to bassoons, side-drums to kettledrums, and gongs to cymbals. I even do not see why they have retained the one horn, for they take a pleasure in smothering it with the other brass instruments; it really does not serve any purpose; while the four wretched violins and the three double-basses are hardly heard any better. This singular agglomeration of instruments requires special skill on the part of the *operatori* in order to adapt to the exigences of the modern orchestra (consecrated phrase!) the instrumentation of the ancient masters, which they operate, dismember, and make into an olla podrida, in conformity with

the process I told you of at the beginning of my letter. And these operations, be it understood, are carried out in a fashion worthy of everything that is manipulated here under the name of music. The oboe parts are entrusted to the trumpets, those of the bassoon to the tubas, those of the harp to the piccolos, and so on.

The musicians (the musicians!!!) play approximately what is written, without, however, any nuance whatever; the *mezzo forte* is variable and constant. The *forte* comes in when the big drums, the side-drums, and the gongs are employed, the *piano* when these are silent; such are the nuances known and observed. The conductor of the orchestra looks like a deaf man leading the deaf; he beats time with heavy blows with his baton on the wood of his desk, never accelerating or slowing down, whether it be a question of restraining a group that has become impassioned (it is true that no one ever gets impassioned), or to stimulate a group that is falling asleep; he gives way to nobody; he moves as mechanically as the rod of a metronome; his arm goes up and down; the players may look at him or not, as they like, it matters nothing to him. This human machine functions only during the overtures, dance tunes, and choruses; for as it is absolutely impossible, in the airs and duets, to foresee the rhythmic caprices of the singers and conform to them, the orchestral conductors have long ago given up indicating any tempo whatever; the players have thus a free rein; they accompany by instinct as well as they can, until the mess becomes a trifle too formidable. The singers thereupon sign to them to stop, and they hasten to do so, the accompaniment ceasing altogether. I have been in Italy a short while only, and I have already often had the pleasure of admiring this beautiful *orchestral effect*.

But adieu for tonight, my friend; I thought myself stronger; the pen drops from my fingers. I am afire with fever. Mina, Mina, no letters! What care I for the Italians and their barbarity? Mina! I see the chaste moon gazing at its reflection in Etna. Silence reigns! Mina! . . . far away . . . alone. . . . Mina! Mina! . . . Paris! . . .

SECOND LETTER

*Sicily, 8 June 2344**From the Same to the Same*

What a martyrdom our Minister has inflicted on me—to remain thus in Italy, kept here by my promise, too lightly given, not to leave until I have engaged the number of singers we lack! And this, when the smallest ship would carry me through the skies to the spot where is my life! . . . What portends her silence? . . . I am very unhappy! To be forced to busy myself about music in this consuming vertigo, this turmoil of all my senses, in the midst of this stormy conflict of a thousand sufferings! . . . And yet it must needs be. Oh, my friend, the cult of art is a joy only for serene souls; well do I feel it from the indifference and disgust I experience with regard to the very things that in former days were the objects of my deepest interest. No matter! Back to my task.

Hearing of the mission entrusted to me and my duties in Euphonia, the members of the Sicilian Academy have written to me this morning, asking me for information about the organization of music in our city; they have heard a lot about it, yet not one of them, in spite of the remarkable facilities for travelling, has so far had the curiosity to visit it. Please send me, by return of mail, a copy of our charter, with a concise description of the town that is the curator of the great art we adore. I shall read both to the learned assembly; I am anxious to enjoy the pleasure of seeing at close range the astonishment of these good academicians, who are so far from knowing *what music is*.

I have said nothing to you about either the concerts or the festivals in Italy, for the reason that these celebrations are obsolete in that country; they would not excite any emotion among the people, and the performances of them could not, in any case, differ greatly from those I have heard in the theatres. As regards sacred music, there is none of this either, from our point of view, which we realize so nobly in the matter of the application of all the resources of art to the divine service. Recent popes having

prohibited in the churches all other music but that of the ancient choir-masters of the Sixtine Chapel, such as Palestrina and Allegri, they have, by this grave decision, ended for ever the scandal of which certain writers whose opinion seems to us to have had some value complained so bitterly a few centuries ago. It is true that violin concertos are no longer played during the mass, that cavatinas sung in a *false alto voice* by an entire man are heard no more, the organist does not now play grotesque fugues or the overtures to comic operas; but it is none the less to be regretted that this expulsion, for which there were only too good grounds, of offensive and ridiculous monstrosities should have also brought about that of the noble and elevated productions of art. The works of Palestrina could never be in our eyes, nor in those of any person possessing today's ordinary knowledge of the real religious style, completely musical or absolutely religious. They are tissues of consonant chords the woof of which is sometimes curious to the eye (or even to the mind when the difficulties with which the author *amused* himself in finding the solution are taken into consideration), and whose gentle and soothing effect on the ear frequently induces a profound reverie; but this is not music in its entirety, since it makes no use of melody, expression, rhythm, or instrumentation. The Sicilian savants will, I think, be greatly surprised to learn with what care it is forbidden in our schools to regard these puerilities of counterpoint otherwise than as exercises, to see in them an object rather than a means of art, and, taking them thus seriously, to transform scores into tables of logarithms or chess-boards. On the whole, however, if it is regrettable that one can hear nothing in churches but *serene vocal harmonies*, one must at least rejoice at the destruction of the offensive style, which has been the result of this decision. Of two evils, let us congratulate ourselves on having only the lesser. Moreover, the popes have long since permitted women to sing in church, believing that their presence and their participation in the divine service were merely natural and bound to appear more moral than the barbarous custom of castration that was tolerated, nay, encouraged, by their predecessors. It has taken centuries to discover this! Formerly it was permissible for women to sing during the service, but on condition that they sang badly; as soon as their knowledge of music enabled them to sing well, and, as a

result, to appear in a choir that was artistically organized, composers were forbidden to employ them. It would seem, when reading history, that at certain periods our art was subjected to the despotic influence of idiocy and madness.

The choirs of the Italian churches, generally speaking, are small in numbers; they consist of twenty to thirty voices at most, on great festal days. The choristers have seemed to me well selected; it is true they sing without nuances, but in tune and with unity; and they must evidently be classed as far superior to the wretched brawlers of the theatres, of whom I abstain from speaking.

Farewell, I leave you to write to Mina once more; am I to be more fortunate this time, and will she at last reply to me?

Your friend,
Xilef

PARIS

(*A splendidly furnished drawing-room*)

MINA (*alone*): Oh my, it looks as if I am going to be bored. Are these gentlemen amusing themselves at my expense? What! Not one of them has so far dreamt of suggesting anything diverting for today. Here I am, alone, forsaken for four long hours. The Baron himself, the most attentive, the most assiduous of all, has not yet made his appearance. Faith, they have perhaps acted wisely in leaving me in peace, for all these beaux who adore me are so stupid! They never speak to me about anything but fêtes, races, intrigues, scandals, and dress; not a word that indicates intelligence or a feeling for art, nothing that springs from the heart. And I am above all an artist, and artist by—the soul, by the heart. Why do I hesitate to say this? As a matter of fact, am I sure that I possess a soul and a heart? Pshaw! Already I no longer feel the slightest love for Xilef. I have not even answered his burning letters. He accuses me, he is in despair, and I think of him—sometimes, but rarely. Come, it is not my fault if, as my fool of a baron says, *the absent are always in the wrong, and the present always accepted*.¹ It is not my affair to make the world over again. Why

¹Berlioz puns on the double meaning of *les présents* (*those present, and gifts*). (E. N.)

did he go away? A man who loves truly should never leave his mistress; he should see only her in the whole world, and count all else as nothing.

FANNY (*entering*): Madam, here are your newspapers and a couple of letters.

MINA (*unfolding a newspaper*): Come!—Ah, the Gluck Festival at Euphonia next week. I must go there and sing. (*Reading*) "The hymn composed by Shetland is the talk of the whole town. Never yet, we believe, has a nobler enthusiasm been more magnificently expressed. Shetland is an exceptional man, different from other men by his genius, his character, and the mystery of his life." Fanny, ask my mother to come.

FANNY (*going out*): You are not reading your letters, madam; I think there is one from your fiancé, Mr. Xilef.

MINA (*alone*): My fiancé! What a funny word! Oh, how ridiculous is a fiancé! And he may call me his fiancée, and that makes me ridiculous too. The silly girl, with her grotesque expressions! All this is distasteful to me, sends me into convulsions, exasperates me. She has guessed only too well. Yes, this letter is from my faithful Xilef. There he goes—reproaches—his sufferings—his love—always the same story. Young man, you worry me. My poor Xilef, you are assuredly done for. These everlastingly passionate beings are really unbearable. Who asks them to be constant? Who ever asked him to adore me? Who indeed! Well, it was I myself, I think; he did not dream of it. And now that he has lost for my sake the peace of his life (as they say in novels), it is rather unscrupulous of me to give him the slip. Yes, but—we have only one life to live.

Let us have a look at the other letter. (*Laughing*) Oh, oh, here's a laconic epistle for you! A horse—very well drawn, I must say—and not a word. It is at once a signature and a hieroglyph. It means that my brute of a baron expects me to come for a drive with him in the Bois de Boulogne. He can go for his drive without me. (*Madame Happer comes in, treading heavily.*) Heavens, mother, how long it takes you to come when I call you; I have been cooling my heels here for over half an hour, and yet I have no time to lose.

MADAME HAPPER: What is the matter, my daughter? What new folly are you about to commit? You seem very excited.

MINA: We are going away.

MADAME HAPPER: You are going away?

MINA: We are going away, mother.

MADAME HAPPER: But I have no desire to leave Paris, where I am quite comfortable; especially if, as I suspect, it is to rejoin your pale-faced lover. I repeat, Mina, your behaviour is unpardonable; you are wanting in respect both to me and to yourself. This marriage does not suit us in any way, since the young man's fortune is not satisfactory. And then he has ideas, such strange ideas concerning women! Really, you are mad, mad three times over—pardon me for saying so—a ninny, for all your wit and talent. No one has ever come across such a choice, nor such a mania for nuptials. And I had thought that the brilliant society you are in the habit of seeing here had brought you back to your senses; but it would seem that your caprices are intermittent fevers, and that the fit has once more returned.

MINA (*bowing with exaggerated respect*): My respectable mother, you are sublime! I will not say that you improvise wonderfully, for I am sure that it was to prepare the lecture to which you have treated me that you kept me waiting so long. No matter, eloquence has its value. But you have been preaching to a convert. As I just said, we are leaving; we are going to Euphonia; I am singing at the Gluck Festival; I am not giving Xilef a thought; we change our names at the outset, so as to elude his pursuit; I call myself Nadira, you will pass as my aunt; I am an Austrian débutante, and the great Shetland takes me under his protection; I make a tremendous hit; everybody goes wild over me; as to the rest—all in good time.

MADAME HAPPER: O merciful God, bless her! I have found my daughter again. At last reason has— Kiss me, you perfect beauty. I am choking with joy. No more silly ideas about so-called promises, that's sense. Yes, let us leave. And that little simpleton of a Xilef, who had the impudence to dream of my own Mina and wanted to take her from me! Oh, may I at least have the pleasure of telling him plainly what I think of him, that *marrying man*; that's my part of the business, and I am going to— The brat! A singer of such talent, and so beautiful! Yes, my lad, she is yours, depend upon it! I shall get rid of him in ten lines; our trunks will be packed in a couple of hours, our mail-boat is ready, and to—

morrow we shall be at Euphonia, where we triumph, while the little gentleman will be hunting for us in a quite different direction. Oh, I am going to give him something to do! (*Exit Madame Happer breathing like a whale and crossing herself repeatedly.*)

FANNY (*who has been present for the few last minutes*): So you are leaving him, madame?

MINA: Yes, it's over.

FANNY: Oh, heavens, he loves you so, and he had put all his faith in you! So you do not love him any longer, not a little bit?

MINA: No.

FANNY: I am frightened. Some misfortune will happen, madame; he will take his life.

MINA: Nonsense!

FANNY: He will kill himself for sure.

MINA: Come now, that's enough!

FANNY: Poor young man!

MINA: Now then, you idiot, will you hold your tongue! Go and rejoin my mother, and help her to make the necessary preparations for our departure. And none of your remarks, please, if you wish to remain in my service. (*Exit Fanny.*)

MINA (*alone*): He will kill himself!—It would seem as if I ought to— Besides, is it my fault—if I don't love him any more?

She sits down to the piano and sings for a few minutes; then her fingers wander over the keyboard, reproducing the theme of Shetland's first symphony, which she had heard six months earlier. She murmurs, while playing: "It is really beautiful; there is in the melody something so exquisitely tender, so capriciously passionate." She stops.—Prolonged silence.—She resumes the symphonic theme. "Shetland is a man apart—different from other men—by his genius, his character (continuing to play), and the mystery of his life. (She goes into the minor key.) According to Xilef, he will never love me!" The theme reappears, fugued, dislocated, broken. Crescendo. An explosion in the major key. Mina goes to a mirror and tidies her hair, humming the first bars of the theme of the symphony.—Renewed silence. She notices the Baron's letter with a horse drawn in outline, takes a pen, traces on the neck of the animal a loose bridle, and rings. A liveried servant appears. "Return this to the baron; it is my reply. (Aside) He is stupid enough not to understand it."

FANNY (*entering*): Madame, everything is ready.

MINA: Has my mother written to—?

FANNY: Yes, madame, I have just posted the letter.

MINA: Both of you get up into the ship; I am following you.

The maid retires. Mina sits down on a couch, folds her arms across her chest, and remains for an instant absorbed in thought. She bows her head, an imperceptible sigh escapes from her lips, a slight flush tinges her cheeks; finally, picking up her gloves, she rises and walks out, saying with an ill-tempered gesture: "Ah well, let him do as he likes."

THIRD LETTER

Euphonia, 6 July 2344

Shetland to Xilef

Here, my dear and sad friend, are the musical chart and the description of Euphonia. These documents are in some respects incomplete; but your enforced leisure will enable you to revise my hurried labours, and if you will draw on your recollections, you will complete them without much trouble. I would not send you the mere text of the musical police regulations; it was necessary to give your Sicilian academicians an approximate idea of our harmonious city by means of a succinct but exact description. I have therefore had to take my pen and portray Euphonia as well as I could; but you will excuse the inaccuracies in my work, as well as what is diffuse and unfinished in it, when you learn the strange emotions that have for some days past so deeply troubled me. Appointed, as you know, to take charge of everything connected with the Gluck Festival, I have had to compose the hymn to be sung about the temple. I have had to superintend the rehearsals of *Alceste* (which was performed in the Thessalian temple), preside over the studies of the choruses of my hymn, and also take your place in the management of the string-instruments. But all that was mere child's-play for me; the sombre preoccupations, the cruel recollections, the deep discouragement into which

ancient and incurable sorrows have plunged me, have at least, by freeing it from all passionate influences, given my character the calm seriousness which, far from fettering activity, helps it, and which you, unfortunately, do not possess. It is suffering that paralyses our artistic faculties; it alone, with its searing embrace, arrests the noblest impulses of the heart; it is suffering that destroys us, turns us to stone, drives us mad, makes us stupid. I myself, as you are aware, was free from those burning sorrows, my heart and senses were at rest, enjoying the sleep of death, from the time that—the—silver star vanished from my heaven . . . and my mind and fancy were all the better for this. Hence I could put to good use almost all my spare time, employing it as art dictated to me. And so far I have not failed to accomplish this, less from love of glory than from love of the beautiful, to which we both trend instinctively, without any after-thought of vainglorious satisfaction.

What has moved me, troubled and ravaged me, was not the composing of my hymn, nor the plaudits with which our musical population greeted it, nor the praises of the Minister, nor the joy of the Emperor, whom my music, if his Majesty is to be believed, transported with enthusiasm; not even the very great effect that the work produced on myself; nothing of all that. It is a strange event that has worked upon me more than I thought anything could have done, and the impression produced by it unfortunately does not fade.

As I was inhaling the evening's freshness after a long rehearsal, lazily stretched out in my little ship, and, from the height I had reached, gazing at the dying day, I heard issuing from a cloud, the contour of which I was skirting, a woman's voice, strident yet pure, the extraordinary agility, the capricious flights and charming evolutions of which seemed, thus resounding in mid-air, like the song of some marvellous and invisible bird. I suddenly stopped my locomotive. . . . After a few minutes' waiting I saw, through the mists purpled by the setting sun, a balloon drifting rapidly in the direction of Euphonia; a young woman was standing in the forepart of the ship, bending in an enchanting attitude over a harp, the strings of which she swept at intervals with her right hand, which was sparkling with diamonds. She was not alone, since in the interior of the ship several other women were to be seen

flitting past the windows of the cabin. At first I thought they were some of the young ladies of the rue des Soprani who, like myself, were enjoying an aerial promenade.

She was singing, and decorating with all kinds of extravagant vocalises, the theme of my first symphony, which I thought was scarcely known except to the Euphonians. Soon, however, on looking more closely at the charming creature who was warbling so brilliantly, I realized that she was not one of us and that she had so far not appeared in Euphonia. Her look, both absent-minded and inspired, astonished me by the singularity of its expression, and I at once thought of the calamity it would be to a man who should love a woman like this without having his love returned. Then I thought no more of it. . . . The high mountain-tops of the Hartz were already concealing the view of the sun on the horizon; I made my ship rise perpendicularly some hundreds of feet in order to see the fugitive sun once more and I gazed at it for some minutes, in the midst of that ecstatic silence of which one has no idea upon earth. At last, tired of dreaming and being alone in the sky, and the west wind wafting towards me the distant harmonies of the Tour, which rang out the vesper hymn, I descended, or rather swept like a dart down on my summer residence, which, as you are aware, is situated outside the walls of the town. I spent the night there, sleeping badly; a score of times within a few hours I saw in my dreams the beautiful stranger bending over her harp, emerging from her red and golden cloud. In the end I even dreamed that I was ill-using her, that my bad treatment and brutalities had made her fearfully unhappy; I saw her at my feet, broken, in tears, while I was coldly congratulating myself on having succeeded in subduing the graceful but dangerous animal. A strange vision for my soul, which is so far removed from feelings of this kind!

Hardly arisen, I went to sit at the back of my rose arbour, and mechanically, without consciousness of my act, I threw wide open the folding doors of my Æolian harp. In an instant, floods of harmony inundated the garden; *crescendo*, *forte*, *decrescendo*, *pianissimo* followed each other pell-mell under the capricious breath of the wild morning breeze. My heart was beating painfully, yet I was not in the least tempted to escape from this suffering by closing the doors of the melancholy instrument. On the

contrary, I derived pleasure from it, and I listened motionless. Just as a gust of wind stronger than its predecessors drew from the harp, like a cry of passion, the chord of the dominant seventh, and carried it wailing through the arbour, chance willed it that from the decrescendo there came an arpeggio embodying the melody of the first bars of the theme I had heard my unknown sing the day before—the theme of my first symphony. Surprised at this freak of nature, I opened my eyes, which I had kept closed from the commencement of the Æolian concert. . . . She was standing before me, beautiful, mighty, sovereign, goddess! I sprang to my feet. “Madame!”—“I am happy, sir, to appear before you at the moment when the spirits of the air address so graceful a compliment to you; they will no doubt dispose you to grant the indulgence I bespeak, one of which the great Shetland, I have been told, is not lavish.”—“Who is it, madame, who has come thus early to breathe life into my solitude?”—“My name is Nadira; I am a singer; I have just come from Vienna; I wish to see the Gluck Festival; I want to sing in it; and I have come to beg you to give me a place in your program.”—“Madame—”—“Oh, you must first hear me, that is only fair.”—“It is unnecessary; I have already had the pleasure of hearing you.”—“Where, and when?”—“Yesterday evening, in the sky.”—“So it was you who was sailing so solitarily, and whom I met as I emerged from my cloud, at the very moment when I was singing your admirable melody? That beautiful phrase was doubtless foredoomed to serve as a musical introduction to our first two meetings.”—“It was I.”—“And you heard me?”—“I saw you and admired you.”—“Good heavens! The man has wit, he is going to quiz me, and I shall have to accept his banter as a compliment!”—“God preserve me from banter, madame; you are beautiful.”—“What, again! Yes, I am beautiful, and, in your opinion, I can sing?”—“You sing—too well.”—“What do you mean by too well?”—“I mean it, madame; ornate song is not admitted at the Gluck Festival; your own shines especially by the lightness and grace of the embellishments; consequently there is no place for it in a ceremony that is eminently grand and epic.”—“So you deny my request?”—“Alas, it must needs be.”—“Oh, this is unbelievable!” she said, reddening with anger, and tearing from its stem a lovely rose, which she crumpled between her fingers: “I shall address myself to the Minister—”

(I smile) "to the Emperor."—"Madame," I said to her quite calmly, but seriously, "the Minister of the Gluck Festival is my humble self; the Emperor of the Gluck Festival is likewise myself; the conduct of the ceremony has been entrusted to me; I regulate it with a free hand, I am absolute master; and" (looking at her half angrily) "you will not sing in it." Thereupon the beautiful Nadira tremblingly wipes her eyes, into which vexation had caused a few tears to well, and hurries away.

My semi-anger having passed away, I could not help laughing at the simplicity of this crazy young woman, accustomed no doubt at Vienna, in the midst of her worshippers, to see everything bow to her caprices, who had thought that there was nothing to prevent her coming to destroy the harmony of our festival and impose her will on me.

I saw no more of her for some days. The festival took place. *Alceste* was worthily given; after the performance the six thousand voices of the amphitheatre sang my hymn, which I had scored only for a hundred families of clarinets and saxophones, another hundred of flutes, four hundred 'cellos, and three hundred harps. The effect, as I have already told you, was very grand. The storm of applause being over, the Emperor rose, and, complimenting me with his customary courtesy, was graciously pleased to cede to me his right to designate the woman who should have the honour of crowning Gluck's statue. Renewed shouts and plaudits from the multitude. In that moment of radiant enthusiasm my eyes fell on the beautiful Nadira, who, from a distant box, was fixing a humble and saddened gaze on me. Of a sudden, tenderness, pity, and even a sort of remorse gripped my heart, at the sight of beauty vanquished and eclipsed by art. It struck me that, as a generous conqueror, art should now yield to beauty part of its glory; and I designated Nadira, the frivolous Viennese singer, to crown the god of expression. The general astonishment cannot be pictured; no one knew her. Flushing and turning pale in turns, Nadira rises, receives from the hands of Gluck's pontiff the crown of flowers, leaves, and wheat-ears that she is to place on the divine brow, comes slowly into the amphitheatre, ascends the steps of the temple, and on reaching the foot of the statue, turns towards the multitude, indicating by a sign that she wishes to speak. All are silent, all admire her; even the women are struck with her extreme

beauty. "Euphonians," she says, "I am unknown to you. But yesterday I was an ordinary woman, gifted with a brilliant and agile voice, and nothing more. The great art had not been revealed to me. I have just heard *Alceste* for the first time in my life, and with you I have admired the splendid majesty of Shetland's hymn. Now I understand, I grasp, I live; I am an artist. The instinctive genius of Shetland alone could divine this. Permit me therefore, before crowning the king of expression, to prove to you, his faithful worshippers, that I am worthy of this signal honour, and that the great Shetland was not mistaken." At these words, tearing the pearls and gems from her hair, she flings them to the ground, tramples them underfoot (a symbolic abjuration), places her hand over her heart, bows her head in front of Gluck, and, in a voice sublime in its accent and timbre, begins the aria of *Alceste*: "*Ah! divinités implacables!*"

Impossible, dear Xilef, to describe to you with any semblance of fidelity the immense emotion produced by this extraordinary singing. All heads bowed gradually, every heart was overflowing; here and there members of the audience, clasping their hands, raised them mechanically to their heads; our young woman burst into tears, and at the end, on the return of the immortal phrase: "*Ce n'est pas vous faire une offense que de vous conjurer de hâter mon trépas* (I am not committing any offence to you when I entreat you to hasten my death)," Nadira, accustomed to the clamorous enthusiasm of her Viennese, must for a moment have felt a horrible anguish; not a hand applauded. The entire amphitheatre remained silent and aghast; but a minute later, each one recovering breath and voice (please admire once more the musical sense of our Euphonians), and without either the prefect of the choruses or myself having made the slightest sign to indicate the harmony, ten thousand voices burst out spontaneously *on the chord of the diminished seventh*, followed by a magnificent cadence in C major. Nadira, who had at first faltered, stands erect again at this harmonious clamour, and raising her statue-like arms, radiant with admiration, joy, beauty, and love, she places the crown on the powerful head of Gluck, the Olympian. Inspired in my turn by this majestic scene, and to temper an enthusiasm that was drifting towards passion, I, perhaps already jealous, gave the sign for the march from *Alceste*, and, all falling on our knees, we fervent

Euphonians rendered homage to the sovereign master of this religious melopœia.

On rising, we look for Nadira; she has disappeared. Hardly have I reached my home when I see her entering it. She comes towards me, bows, and says: "Shetland, you have initiated me into art, you have given me a new life; I love you. . . . Can you love me? I make you a gift of my whole being; my life, my soul, and my beauty are yours." After a moment's silent hesitation, in which I thought of my former love, which was fading away, I replied: "Nadira, you have made me see beyond art a sublime ideal . . . I love you in all sincerity . . . I accept you. . . . But should you deceive me today or at any time, you are a lost woman."—"Neither today nor ever can I deceive you; but should I have to pay with a cruel death for the happiness of belonging to you, I desire that happiness, I ask it of you . . . Shetland!"—"Nadira! . . ." Our arms . . . our hearts . . . our souls . . . the infinite. . . .

No longer is there a Nadira; it is I who am Nadira. No more a Shetland; Shetland is she.

I am ashamed, dear Xilef, to tell such a tale to you, whose heart, lacerated by absence, is bleeding; but passion and happiness are egoism itself. And yet my happiness has intermittences, and its luminous atmosphere is sometimes traversed by fearful rays of darkness. I remember that at the moment when I said to Nadira: "I love you in all sincerity!" three strings of my harp broke with a mournful sound. From this incident was born a superstitious idea. Does it portend a farewell from the art that is losing me? It indeed seems to me that I no longer love it. But listen again:

Yesterday, a scorching day of a scorching summer, we were hovering, she and I, high up in the skies. My ship, which I was not steering, was wandering at the will of a feeble breath of the east wind; clasping each other frantically, intoxicated with love, stretched on the soft ottoman of my scented car, we were on the threshold of the other life; a single step, a single exercise of the will, and we could cross it! "Nadira!" I said to her, straining her to my heart.—"My beloved!"—"Come, life has nothing more for us in this world; we have reached the summit; shall we return to the earth? Let us die." She gave me a surprised look. "Yes, let us die," I continued, "let us fling ourselves over the ship's side in each other's arms; our souls, fused in a last kiss, will breathe them

selves out towards heaven ere our bodies, whirling through space, shall have reached the prosaic earth again. Will you? Come!"—"Later," was her answer. "Let us still live awhile."—Later! But shall we find such a moment later? I thought. Oh, Nadira, you are merely a woman, then? . . . And so I remain, since she wishes to do so. . . . Farewell, my friend; throughout the two hours passed in writing to you—I have not seen her, and during the whole of the time I am now passing away from her, I seem to feel an icy hand slowly tearing the heart out of my bosom.

Shetland

Madame Happer's letter, in which that respectable matron, while cynically informing Xilef that her daughter released him from his promise and gave him up, also announced to him Mina's departure to America, whither she had been called by the attractive offer of a theatrical manager and the *friendship* of a wealthy shipowner. I could paint but imperfectly the shock, the distraction, the indignation, the grief, the infinite fury of a soul both tender and terrible, such as that of Xilef, on reading such a masterpiece of brutality, insolence, and bad faith. He shook from head to foot; tears and flames sprang simultaneously from his eyes; and the idea of a punishment fitting the crime immediately took hold of his mind. He immediately resolved, after having informed Shetland of what had happened to him, to leave at once for America, where he trusted he would soon discover his perfidious mistress. He was thus breaking from everything attaching him to Euphonia, losing his position, and at one stroke destroying his present and future. What mattered it to him? Was there any other interest in life for Xilef now except that of his revenge? Shetland's letter, and with it the description of Euphonia, reached him just as he was leaving Palermo; and he had only time to send the document to the Sicilian Academy, with a few lines in which he apologized for not being able to present and read it in person as he had promised.

Here is Shetland's manuscript as the President of the Academy read it at a public sitting. Xilef had not made a single alteration in it.

DESCRIPTION OF EUPHONIA

Euphonia is a small town of twelve thousand souls, situated on the slopes of the Hartz, in Germany.

It may be looked upon as a vast *conservatoire* of music, since the exercise of this art is the sole aim of the labours of its inhabitants.

All Euphonians, men, women, and children, are exclusively occupied with singing, playing instruments, and whatever else has a direct connexion with music. Most of them are both instrumentalists and singers. Some, who do not perform, devote themselves to the manufacture of instruments or to the engraving and printing of music. Others consecrate their time to acoustic research and to the study of everything in physics that bears on the production of sound.

Players of instruments and singers are classed by categories in the several quarters of the town.

Each order of voice and instrument has a street bearing its name, and inhabited only by the part of the population that practises that particular voice or instrument. There are streets of sopranos, basses, tenors, contraltos, violins, horns, flutes, harps, and so on.

Needless to say, Euphonia is governed in military style and subjected to a despotic regime. Hence the perfect order reigning in the studies and the marvellous results obtained from them by the art.

Moreover, the Emperor of Germany does all he can to make the Euphonians' fate a happy one. In return he only asks them to send him, two or three times a year, a few thousand musicians for the festivals he organizes at different points of the Empire. Seldom does the whole population migrate for that purpose.

On the other hand, on the occasion of the solemn festivals whose sole object is art, it is the listeners who leave their homes to come and hear the Euphonians.

An amphitheatre, somewhat similar to the amphitheatres of Greek and Roman antiquity, but constructed under far better acoustic conditions, is consecrated to monumental performances.

It can accommodate an audience of twenty thousand, and performers to the number of ten thousand.

It is the Minister of Fine Arts who selects from the population of the several cities of Germany the twenty thousand privileged hearers who are permitted to attend these festivals. The choice is always determined by the greater or lesser intelligence or musical culture of the individuals. In spite of the excessive curiosity that these gatherings excite throughout the Empire, no consideration would suffer the admittance of a listener recognized, by his inaptitude, as being unworthy to take part in them.

The education of the Euphonians is carried out in the following fashion: the children are exercised at an early age in all rhythmic combinations; in a few years they reach the point where the fragmentary divisions of the time of the bar, the syncopated forms, the blendings of irreconcilable rhythms, and so on, have no difficulty for them; next comes the study of *solfège* and instruments, and later on, singing and harmony. At the period of puberty, that hour of the efflorescence of life, when the passions begin to make themselves felt, it is sought to develop in them the true sense of expression, and, as a consequence, of good style.

This rare faculty of appreciating truth of expression, whether in the work of the composer or in the performance of his interpreters, is ranked above all others in the opinion of the Euphonians.

Whoever is convicted of being absolutely destitute of it, or of taking pleasure in hearing works of false expression, is inexorably expelled from the city, however eminent his talent or exceptional his voice, unless he consents to descend to some inferior employment, such as the making of catgut or the preparation of hides for kettledrums.

The professors of singing and of the various instruments have under their orders several assistant masters whose duty it is to teach the specialities in which they are known to excel. Thus, as regards the classes for violin, viola, 'cello, and double-bass, in addition to the principal professor who directs the general studies of the instrument, there is one who teaches exclusively the *pizzicato*, another the use of harmonics, another the *staccato*, and so on. Prizes have been established for agility, precision, beauty, and

attitude; then come the broad nuances; and lastly style and **EXPRESSION**.

The indication of the rhythm by movements of the body during the singing is strictly forbidden to the choristers. They are also exercised in silence, a silence so absolute and profound that three thousand Euphonian choristers assembled in the amphitheatre or in any other sonorous place would permit the hearing of the buzzing of an insect and might make a blind man placed among them think he was quite alone. They have reached the point of counting hundreds of pauses, and attacking a chord *en masse* after so long a silence, without a solitary singer missing his entrance.

An analogous system is observed with the orchestral rehearsals; no section is allowed to take part in an ensemble before it has been heard and severely examined separately by the prefects. The entire orchestra then rehearses alone; after that there comes the union of the vocal and the instrumental masses, when the prefects have declared themselves satisfied that each has been sufficiently rehearsed.

The whole mass is next subjected to the criticism of the composer, who listens from the upper part of the amphitheatre that the public will occupy, and, when he finds himself the absolute master of this huge intelligent instrument, when he is sure that nothing remains but to communicate to it the vital nuances that he feels and can impart better than anyone else, the moment has come for him to become a performer himself, and he ascends to the master-desk in order to conduct. A tuning-fork affixed to every desk enables the instrumentalists to tune noiselessly before and during the performance; preludizing and the slightest noises in the orchestra are rigorously prohibited. An ingenious mechanism, which might have been discovered five or six centuries earlier had the pains been taken to look for it, which is actuated by the movements of the conductor without being visible to the public, indicates, *before the eyes* of each executant and quite close to him, the tempo of the bar, also denoting precisely the various degrees of *piano* or *forte*. In this way the performers are immediately and instantaneously put in touch with the feeling of the conductor, to which they respond as promptly as do the hammers of a piano under the hand pressing the keys, and the master can then say with perfect truth that he is *playing the orchestra*.

Chairs of musical philosophy occupied by the most learned men of the time serve to spread among the Euphonians sound ideas on the importance and destination of the art, a knowledge of the laws on which its existence is based, and accurate historical notions of the revolutions it has undergone. It is to one of these professors that is due the singular institution of *concerts of bad music*, which the Euphonians attend at certain periods of the year in order to hear the monstrosities admired for centuries throughout Europe, the production of them even being taught in the *conservatoires* of Germany, France, and Italy; the Euphonians come to study these works to get a clear idea of what is to be most carefully avoided—for instance, the majority of the cavatinas and finales of the Italian school at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the vocal fugues of the more or less religious compositions of epochs anterior to the twentieth. The first experiments thus made on a population whose musical sense is today of an extreme correctness and fineness led to rather singular results. Some of the masterpieces of *bad music*, false in expression and ridiculous in style, yet making a certain effect that, if not agreeable, was at least supportable by the ear, aroused in them a feeling of pity; it seemed to them that they were listening to the productions of children lisping a language they did not understand. Certain works made them burst out laughing, so that it became impossible to continue their performance. But when it came to singing the fugue on *Kyrie eleison* from the most celebrated work of one of the greatest masters of our ancient German school, and they were assured that this had been written, not by a madman, but by a very great musician, who in doing so was merely imitating other masters, and who was in turn imitated for a very long time, their consternation cannot be portrayed. They grieved seriously over this humiliating malady, from the shocks of which, they realized, even human genius was not immune; and their religious sense joining their musical sense in revolt against these ignoble and incredible blasphemies, they sang with one accord the celebrated prayer *Parce Deus*, the expression of which is so true, as if to apologize publicly to God in the name of music and musicians.

As each individual has a voice of some sort, every Euphonian is bound to exercise his and to have some idea of the art of song. It results from this that the orchestral players of string-instru-

ments, who are able both to sing and to play, form a second reserve choir, which the composer employs in certain circumstances, and the unexpected entrance of which occasionally produces the most astonishing effects.

Singers in their turn are compelled to understand the mechanism of certain string and percussion instruments and to be able, if need be, to play them while singing. Thus all of them are also harpists, pianists, guitarists. A great number of them can play the violin, the viola, the viola d'amore, and the 'cello. The children play the modern sistrum and the harmonic cymbals, a new instrument, each stroke on which produces a chord.

The roles in theatrical pieces and the vocal and instrumental solos are entrusted only to Euphonians whose organization and special talent fit them most for the good performance of them. Their selection is determined at a competition held publicly and patiently in the presence of the entire population. All the time necessary is given to it. When the time came to celebrate the decennial anniversary of the Gluck festival, an eight months' search was made among the women singers for the one most capable of playing and singing *Alceste*; nearly a thousand women were heard in succession with that view.

In Euphonia no privileges are granted certain artists to the detriment of art. There are no leading-singers, no rights of possession in the leading roles even when such roles in no way suit their special talent or physique. Composers, ministers, and prefects determine the essential qualities required to fill appropriately such and such a part, to represent this or that character; a search is then made for the individual best equipped with these qualities, and even if he be the most lowly in Euphonia, he is elected as soon as discovered. Occasionally the search and the labour of our musical government are in vain. Thus in 2320, after having hunted for a *Eurydice* for fifteen months, it was compelled to give up the idea of staging Gluck's *Orfeo*, for lack of a young woman beautiful enough to represent that poetic figure and intelligent enough to understand its character.

To the literary education of the Euphonians much attention is given; they are able, up to a certain point, to appreciate the beauties of the great ancient and modern poets. Those among them whose ignorance and lack of culture in this respect may be

complete can never pretend to a part in musical functions of any dignity.

And so it is that thanks to the intelligent will of our Emperor and to his untiring solicitude for the most powerful of the arts, Euphonia has become the wonderful *conservatoire* of monumental music.

The academicians of Palermo thought they were dreaming when listening to the reading of these notes drawn up by the friend of Xilef, and asked themselves whether the youthful Euphonian prefect had not been trying to impose on their credulity. As a consequence it was decided there and then that a delegation of the Academy should visit the musical town, so as to judge for itself of the truth of the extraordinary facts just laid before them.

We left Xilef breathing nothing but revenge, and ready to pursue his insolent mistress in a balloon to America, whither he naïvely thought she had gone. And indeed he left, silent and gloomy as the thunder-clouds that sweep across the sky before the coming of a fearful tempest. He devoured space; never had his locomotive worked so furiously. Did the ship come across a contrary current of air, she would cleave it intrepidly with her prow, or, soaring to a higher zone, would seek either a less unfavourable current or that region of eternal calm that probably no human being before Xilef had ever reached. In those almost inaccessible solitudes, the borderline of life, the cold and aridity are such that the wooden objects in the ship warped and cracked. The sinister pilot Xilef remained impassible, half dead from the rarefaction of the atmosphere, looking calmly at the blood issuing from his nose and mouth, until the impossibility of enduring such pain any longer should compel him to descend in quest of air fit to breathe, and see if the direction of the wind would permit him to remain in it. Such was the impetuosity of his flight that forty hours after his departure from Palermo he landed in New York. Impossible to relate all his searches, not only in the towns, villages, and even hamlets of the United States, Canada, Labrador, and South America as far as the Straits of Magellan, but the islands of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, It was only after a year of these

insane efforts that he saw the uselessness of them, and the idea came to him at last to look for the two rascally women in Europe, where they had probably remained, the more easily to put him off their track. He was moreover desirous of seeing his friend Shetland once more, in order to ask him for the resources that were near failing him; for it may well be imagined that in the course of his furious exploration money had not been spared.

He consequently resolved to return to Euphonia, where he arrived, after a three days' navigation, on the very evening when Nadira and Shetland were holding a fête at their villa. The gardens and reception-rooms were sumptuously illuminated. Xilef, desirous of revealing himself to his friend only, waited, concealed in a grove, for the opportunity of finding him alone. Listening from his hiding-place to the noises of the fête, he started on hearing the tones of a voice recalling to him that of Mina. "Imagination, delirium!" he said to himself. Shetland appeared at last, and suddenly noticing the exile before him, exclaimed: "Heavens, it is you! What a joy! Nothing will be missing from our fête now that you are here."—"Silence, I pray you, Shetland; I cannot show myself. I am no longer a Euphonian; I have lost my post; I have only come to have a talk with you about a serious affair."—"Let us leave serious matters until tomorrow," replied Shetland; "I guarantee your post will be restored to you; you are still one of us. Come with me, I must introduce you to Nadira, who will be delighted to meet you at last." And with the cruel light-heartedness of happy people who are incapable of understanding the sufferings of others, he dragged Xilef against his will towards the spot where the company was gathered. Chance would have it that at the moment when the two friends entered the room in which Nadira was, she, no doubt engrossed in some flirtation, did not perceive them. She was not given time to prepare herself for the shattering appearance of Xilef. As for him, he had recognized his perfidious mistress as soon as he entered; but hatred and suffering had, for a year, given his character such strength, he had so learnt to master his impressions, that he was able instantly to dominate his trouble and conceal it entirely. Xilef and Nadira were consequently brought face to face abruptly and in the manner most calculated to disconcert two less extraordinary beings. The beautiful singer, on meeting the lover whom she had so shame-

fully forsaken and deceived, and seeing at a glance that he did not wish to recognize her, thought she could not do better than imitate him, and greeted him politely yet coldly, but without exhibiting a single symptom of surprise or fear; such was the prodigious habit of dissimulation in the woman. Shetland therefore had no inkling of the truth, and if he noticed a certain coldness in the manner in which Xilef and Nadira greeted each other, he attributed it, on the one hand, to a kind of instinctive jealousy capable of making Nadira regard unfavourably any man who might steal from her the smallest part of the affection of her lover, and, on the other, to the painful reflections on his own misery that Xilef had not been able to avoid when suddenly brought face to face with the intoxication and happiness of others.

The fête proceeded without a single cloud to tarnish its brilliancy. But long before its end the penetration of Xilef had revealed to him, from certain signs imperceptible to any other observer, certain gestures, the accentuation of certain words, the undeniable fact that Nadira was already deceiving Shetland. From that moment the idea of stoical resignation that Xilef had at first conceived, in order not to destroy the happiness of his friend and to leave him in ignorance of Nadira's antecedents, was ousted by sinister thoughts, which of a sudden lit up the darkest recesses of his soul and revealed to him horizons of horror heretofore unknown. His mind was quickly made up. The next day he informed Shetland that he had given up the idea of continuing his journey and that it was consequently useless to talk over with him the affair about which he had at first intended to speak to him; he told him of his intention to remain in Euphonia, but concealed, in obscurity, and inactive. He begged him not to take any step towards having his prefecture restored to him, peace and rest being all he required henceforth in life.

In spite of her astuteness, Nadira allowed herself to be taken in by this pretence of resigned sorrow, and enjoined on her mother to imitate her reserve towards Xilef, who seemingly sought to forget a secret known in Euphonia only to themselves and him.

For the purpose of making the situation less dangerous, Xilef, rarely emerging apparently from the retreat he had selected, saw his friend at distant intervals only, pleading an unsociable disposition, justified by his incurable sorrows. But in various dis-

guises, and with the crafty prudence of a cat during its nocturnal expeditions, he was watching the doings of Nadira and following her in all her secret rendezvous; and in this wise he succeeded, within a few months, in getting a clue to all her intrigues and measuring the full extent of her infamy. There and then the denouement of the drama was determined in his mind. Shetland, at whatever cost, must turn from an existence so defiled and dishonoured; were even death to be the consequence of his disillusionment, it was imperative that the great love, the noble and enthusiastic love, the most sublime sentiment of the human heart, which had fired two eminent artists for such an unworthy creature, should be avenged, and avenged in a terrible and fearful manner, the like of which had never been known. And this is how Xilef succeeded in fulfilling this duty.

In those days there was in Euphonia a celebrated mechanician whose productions caused general astonishment. He had just finished a gigantic piano, the varied sounds of which were so powerful that, under the fingers of a single virtuoso, it could hold its own with an orchestra of a hundred players. Hence the name of orchestra-piano given to it. Nadira's natal day was near; Xilef had no difficulty in convincing his friend that a magnificent present to make to his beautiful beloved would be the new instrument of which all were talking with admiration. "But if you wish to make her joy perfect," he added, "you must add to it the delightful steel summer-house that the same artist has just constructed, the elegance of which is beyond comparison with any structure of the kind with which we are acquainted. It will make a delightful summer boudoir, airy, cool, and grateful during our hot season; you can even inaugurate it by giving a ball presided over by the radiant Nadira." Shetland strongly and joyously approved his friend's idea and even commissioned him to purchase both the masterpieces. Xilef took good care not to delay his visit to the mechanician. After telling him the object of his call, he asked him if it would be possible to add to the summer-house a special and powerful mechanism the nature and effect of which he described to him, and the existence of which was to be kept a secret by both of them. The mechanician, amazed at such a proposal, but fascinated by its novelty and the considerable sum offered him by Xilef to carry it into effect, thought for a moment and replied with

the assurance of genius: "It will be ready in a week's time." "That will do," said Xilef, and the bargain was struck.

A week later the happy Shetland was able to offer his mistress the double present destined for her.

Nadira received it with transports of joy. The summer-house especially delighted her; she never tired of admiring its elegant and solid structure, its curious decorations, the arabesques with which it was covered, its exquisite furniture, and the coolness that made it so precious on the hot nights of dog-days. "It is a charming idea of Xilef," she exclaimed, "to inaugurate it with a ball of close friends, a ball of which my friend Shetland will be the soul, improvising brilliant dance tunes on the new giant-piano. But this magic instrument is too sonorous to stand so close to the audience. Xilef will therefore be kind enough to have it moved from the summer-house and carried to the far end of the garden, in the big reception-room of the villa, where we shall still hear it capitally. I am going to send out my invitations."

This arrangement, which appeared quite natural, and moreover fitted in admirably with Xilef's plan, was promptly carried into execution. The same evening Nadira, adorned like a fairy, and her huge mother, bedecked with rich tinsel, received in the summer-house the young women, who were in every respect worthy of the intimacy with which Nadira honoured them, and the young men whom she had *treated with marked distinction*. The trap was set; Xilef, with fearful sang-froid, saw his victims making towards it in succession. Shetland, still free from mistrust, welcomed them most cordially; but he felt himself weighed down by a feeling of sadness unusual on such an occasion, and going up to Nadira, he said to her ecstatically: "How beautiful you are, dear one! Why, then, do I feel so sad tonight? I ought to be so happy! It seems to me that I am on the brink of some great calamity, some fearful happening. . . . It is you, naughty peri, whose beauty troubles and agitates me to the verge of dizziness."—"Come, you are mad; a truce to visions! You would do better if you went to the piano, for then at least the ball might begin."—"Yes," Xilef put in, "undoubtedly the beautiful Nadira is, as ever, right. To the piano! We are all yearning to open the ball." The accents of a bewitching waltz are immediately heard, while groups of dancers form and whirl. Xilef, standing with his hand on a steel button

placed against the outer wall of the summer-house, follows them with his eyes. Something strange seems to affect him to his innermost soul; his lips are pallid, his eyes misty; from time to time he presses his heart with his hand, as if to restrain its frantic beats. He is still hesitating when he hears Nadira, leaning on the arm of her waltzing partner, hurriedly say to him: "No, not tonight, it is impossible, do not expect me until tomorrow." Xilef's fury at this fresh proof of Nadira's immodesty passes beyond his control; he presses the steel button with all his might, saying: "Tomorrow, you wretches! There is no tomorrow for you!" He runs to Shetland, who, all absorbed in his inspirations, was inundating villa and garden with harmonies now sweet and tender, now wild and despairing. "What are you doing, Shetland?" he shouts; "you are falling asleep; everyone is complaining of the slowness of your time. Quicker, quicker, the waltzers are excited! That's better! Oh, what a beautiful phrase, what astounding harmony, what a threatening pedal! How this theme in the minor key creaks and wails, like a song of the furies! You are a poet, you are a *sooth-sayer*. Harken to their shouts of joy! Oh, your Nadira is very happy!" Fearful shrieks were in fact proceeding from the summer-house; but Shetland, becoming more and more enraptured, was drawing from the orchestra-piano a hurricane of sounds that drowned the cries and concealed their true nature.

The moment Xilef had pressed the spring that started the secret mechanism of the summer-house, the steel walls of the circular-shaped little building had begun to revolve on themselves slowly and noiselessly, so that the dancers, seeing the space in which they were moving growing less, thought at first that their numbers had increased. Surprised, Nadira exclaimed: "Who, then, are the new-comers? There are plainly more of us; we cannot endure it any longer; we shall be suffocated; it even seems as if the windows have become narrower and now let in less fresh air!" Madame Happer, alternately red and pallid, cried out: "Good heavens, gentlemen, what is happening? Carry me out of this! Open everything wide!" But the summer-house, instead of opening, revolves on itself with a suddenly accelerating movement, and doors and windows are immediately masked by an iron wall. The interior space shrinks rapidly; the screams grow in intensity, those of Nadira particularly dominating the din; and the beautiful singer,

the poetic fairy, feeling herself hemmed in on all sides, pushes back those surrounding her with gestures and words of horrible brutality, her low nature, revealed by the fear of death, now appearing in all its hideousness. Xilef has left Shetland in order to see the infernal spectacle at close range. Panting like a tiger licking the prey it has struck down, he roams round the summer-house, shouting with all his might: "Well, Mina, what ails you, my sweet beauty, that you should get into such a passion? Is your steel corset too tight? Ask one of those gentlemen to unlace it; they have been well used to doing so. And your hippopotamus of a mother, how does she feel? I no longer hear her gentle voice!" And indeed, to the horrible and anguishing screams, under the ever-increasing tightening of the steel partitions, has succeeded the hideous noise of flesh being mangled, the cracking of fractured bones, bursting skulls; eyes are forced from their sockets, jets of foaming blood spout out beneath the roof of the summer-house, until the hideous machine stops exhausted over the bloody mass of clay that no longer breathes.

And Shetland is still playing, oblivious of the fête and dances, when Xilef, with haggard eyes, tears him from the keyboard and drags him towards the summer-house, which has just reopened itself, leaving on the tessellated flooring a smoking charnel-house in which human forms are no longer to be distinguished. "Come, now, come, you poor wretch," he cries, "and see what remains of your infamous Nadira, who was my infamous Mina, of her execrable mother, of her eighteen lovers! Look! Has not justice done its work thoroughly?" At the sight of this scene of infinite horror, at the aspect of what divine vengeance spared the damned of the seventh circle, Shetland sinks to the ground. On rising he laughs, rushes distractedly across the garden, singing, calling Nadira, gathering flowers for her, gambolling; he has gone mad.

Xilef, on the contrary, had quieted down, and suddenly he recovered his coolness. "Poor Shetland, he is happy, he said. "I think there is now no more for me to do, and so I may as well take a rest. *Othello's occupation's gone!*" Inhaling the contents of a flask of cyanogen, which never left him, he crashed down as if smitten by thunder.

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Six months after this catastrophe Euphonia, still in mourning, was under the vow of silence. The organ of the tower alone carried into the sky a slow, discordant harmony, like a wail of terrified grief.

Shetland had died a couple of days after Xilef, without recovering consciousness a single instant; and at the funeral of the two friends, whose terrible end, like all the rest of this drama, remained incomprehensible to the entire town, public consternation was such that not only songs but funeral music was prohibited.

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Corsino rolls up his manuscript and leaves.

Following a few minutes' silence, the musicians rise. The conductor, invited by them to the farewell banquet they intend giving me, bows to them on his way out, saying. "Till tomorrow."

BACON: You know, Corsino frightens me.

DIMSKY: To write such awful things a man must be suffering from rabies.

WINTER: He is an Italian!

DERVINCK: He is a Corsican!

TURUTH: He is a brigand!

MYSELF: He is a musician!

SCHMIDT: It is plain that he is not a literary man. When a man has nothing inside his head but such ridiculously extravagant tales, it would be better for him to write—

KLEINER (*interrupting him*): *A visit to Tom Thumb*, eh? You jealous fellow!

SCHMIDT: Kettledrummer!

KLEINER: Buffoon!

SCHMIDT: Bavarian!

MYSELF: Gentlemen, gentlemen, none of these truths at present. We shall have the time to tell them to each other tomorrow evening *inter pocula*.

BACON (*going out*): Really, our guest makes me tired with his Greek. The devil take him! . . .

EPILOGUE

The Stirrup-Dinner.—Corsino's Toast.—

The Conductor's Toast.—Schmidt's Toast.—The Author's Toast.

The End of the Kleiner Brothers' Worries



AT seven o'clock I enter the room selected for the stirrup-dinner. I find assembled there all my good friends of the orchestra of X, including their worthy chief, and even the player of the big drum, who has never looked upon me with favour. But it is a corps repast, and the good fellow has seen fit to lay aside his personal dislikes to attend it. Moreover, it being a question of a *tutti*, he thought to himself: "What would it be without the big drum?" The gathering is like all reunions of artists, gay and noisy. The time for the toasts has come.

Glass in hand, Corsino is the first to rise. "Here's to music, gentlemen," he exclaims; "her reign has come! She protects the drama, dresses up comedy, embalms tragedy, gives a home to painting, intoxicates the dance, shows the door to that little vagabond vaudeville, pours grape-shot into the enemies of her progress; she flings out of the windows the representatives of routine; she triumphs in France, Germany, England, Italy, Russia, and even America; she levies enormous tributes everywhere; she has flatterers too unintelligent to understand her, detractors who cannot appreciate the grandeur of her designs, the learned audacity of her combinations; but all fear and admire her instinctively. She has worshippers who sing odes to her, assassins who always miss her, a guard ready to die for her, which will never surrender. Several of her soldiers have risen to be princes, princes have made themselves her soldiers. People take their hats off to ignoble caricatures that pass for portraits of her, because of the name they bear; prostrating themselves, they shout and applaud with their hands when, on grand days, they see her in person, her brow resplendent with glory and genius. She has passed through the Terror, the Directorate, and the Consulate; now, having reached the Empire, she has constituted her court out of all the queens she has dethroned. *Long live the Emperor!*"

Rising in his turn, the conductor says: "Well said, my good Corsino. With you do I say: *Long live the Emperor!* for I love our art passionately, although I rarely speak of it. And yet I am very far from thinking, as you do, that it is at the apogee of its glory. Europe's state of fermentation causes me to tremble for it! It is true that all is calm at the present time; but has not the last storm bruised and fatigued it cruelly? Are music's wounds healed, and will it not bear hideous cicatrices for a long time?"

"In the minds of the nations of ants at war, in the midst of whom we live, of what use are we poets, artists, musicians, composers, we cicadas of every species?—None whatever. See how we were treated during the last European storm. And when we complained, the warring ants said to us: 'What were you doing yesterday?'—'We were singing.'—'You were singing! Capital! Well, then, now dance.' In fact, what interest can you expect nations to take at the present time in our impulses, our efforts, our most impassioned dramas? What signify our *Bénédiction des poignards*, our choruses of *La Révolte*, our *Rondes du Sabbat*, our *Chansons de brigands*, our *Galops infernaux*, our abracadabra of all sorts, beside the colossal hymn to suffering, rage, and destruction sung simultaneously by millions of voices? . . . What are our orchestras compared to these formidable hordes animated by the thunder, who perform the hurricane, led by the indefatigable conductor whose bow is a scythe and whose name is *Death*? . . .

"And what sort of things and men is it that these upheavals sometimes suddenly bring into prominence? What are the voices that make themselves heard in the midst of so many sinister rumours? The scared nightingale, having returned to its thicket, shuts its eyes to the lightning-flashes, and replies to the thunder only with silence. We who are not nightingales do likewise; the chaffinch crouches in the hollow of its oak, the lark in its furrow; the cock returns to the fowls' house, the pigeon to its dove-cote, the sparrow to its barn. The guinea-fowl and the peacock perched on their dung-heap, the osprey and the owl in their ruin, the rook and the crow lost in the fog, alone unite their discordant voices and pay their respects to the tempest.

"No, great are the difficulties, numerous the obstacles, slow and hard the labour for our art nowadays. And yet I hope and believe that by our constancy, courage, and dignity, art can still be saved.

Let us therefore band together and be patient, energetic, and proud! Let us prove to the peoples distracted by so many grave interests that if we are the last-born of civilization, if we have for a moment enjoyed its liveliest sympathy, we were worthy of it. Perhaps then they will understand how much art would suffer were we to perish.

"I raise my glass to the artists whom nothing will debase or dishearten, true, valiant, strong artists!"—Applause. Bacon (whispering to Kleiner): "He seldom speaks, does our chief, but when he does, he knows what to say."—"Yes," says the younger Kleiner, "but all this is very serious." (Rising) "I drink, for my part, to our comrade Schmidt, so that he may enliven us a bit, for we are drifting towards politics and I know nothing more . . . provoking."

Schmidt makes a grimace, and, glass in hand, stands on his chair. "Gentlemen," he says in his rattle-like voice, "so as not to depart too abruptly from the subject of the preceding speeches, I must tell you that Corsino's faith and enthusiasm, and the clinging of our chief to a hope I had believed was extinct in him, afford me the greatest pleasure. It may be that I too shall attain to belief and hope. One moment! It even seems to me that faith and hope are together coming back to me. I do not yet feel strong enough to transport mountains . . . but, God forgive me, it will come, for upon my honour I believe that I believe.

"On what do the revolutions of the human mind hang! Just now I was more incredulous than a professor of algebra. I had thought that two and two made four; and yet, like Paul-Louis Courier, the French vine-grower, I was not so sure about it.

"And now, as a result of the fine sermons we have just been treated to, were I told that Monsieur —— had done . . . that Mademoiselle —— did not do . . . that Madame —— did not say . . . I should be capable of believing it.

"Admire, by the way, the kindness of my blunderbuss in not firing! What luck, were I evil-minded, if a sentence so loaded with grape-shot should go off! I might attribute good deeds to rascals, fine works to blockheads, good sense to fools, and talent to Kleiner. . . ."—"Well spoken; you have got your deserts, Kleiner, you wanted to be *enlivened*" (hisses); "you have what you asked for." —Schmidt, resuming: "Yes, I might grant our theatre a

public, our singers voice and style, our actresses beauty, our director a feeling for art; really my blunderbuss might create a fearful havoc. But no; its open mouth shall remain silent; I uncock it, and for greater security" (swallowing a large glass of wine) "I damp the powder. For if one has seen unloaded shot-guns go off, all the more reason that such a thing might happen to a loaded blunderbuss that is uncocked. I wish to be a kind fellow today, but as kind as the heavy cannon on our ramparts, inoffensively basking in the sun, and in whose mouths the fowls build their nests. I wish to propose a simple, cordial toast, which the two honourable gentlemen who have preceded me ought to have proposed before me. They have left me the honour and I take advantage of it, so much the worse! I drink to the guest whom we love, and who is about to leave us; may he soon return to help us once more during our nocturnal labours!" Prolonged cheers, plaudits, and handshakings. "You see," exclaims Schmidt triumphantly, "it is the jokers who have the most heart."

I rise in turn. "Thanks, my dear Schmidt. Gentlemen, my opinion as to the present and future of art is rather like Corsino's, and still more that of your distinguished leader. I sometimes find myself sharing the perfervid enthusiasm of the former, but the fears of the latter quickly come to cool it, and the remembrance of many a disheartening experience has added further to my bitterness, if not to my discouragement. Political agitations are doubtless a terrible obstacle to the prosperity of music as we understand it. Unfortunately, if it suffers and languishes, the primary causes of its most genuine ills are very close to it, and I believe that it is chiefly in that direction that we must seek them. Our art, essentially complex as it is, needs the full strength of many agents if it is to exercise its full power; and to give them an indispensable unity of action we need to have *authority*—strong and absolute authority. Corsino has sensed this necessity to perfection in the organization of his Euphonia. But to that artistic authority, which we must suppose to be intelligent and devoted, we needs must add the sinews of war and industry; funds are required. Where are these four powers, authority, intelligence, devotion, and money, to be found constantly together? I am unable to say. Their union exists but transiently and on rare, exceptional occasions. The agitated and precarious life that music leads in Europe nowadays is principally

due to the grievous alliances it has suffered to be imposed on it, and to the prejudices that push it now in this direction, now in that. It is the Cassandra of Virgil, the inspired virgin for whom Greeks and Trojans contend, whose prophetic words are not heeded, and who raises to heaven her eyes, and them alone, since her hands are fettered. Many are the sad and true things that have been said on this subject at our recent evenings in the orchestra, during what Schmidt calls your *nocturnal labours*. Allow me to resume them here.

"From its alliance with the theatre, an alliance that has produced, and could again produce, such magnificent results, have come the slavery and the shame of music, and all sorts of degradation. You are aware, gentlemen, it is not only with its sisters, dramatic poetry and the dance, that she must unite nowadays in the theatre, but also with a number of inferior arts grouped about her to stimulate a puerile curiosity and turn the attention of the crowd away from its essential object. The managers of the great "lyric" theatres, having noticed that enormous works alone enjoy the privilege of bringing enormous receipts, no longer attach any value except to compositions of excessive length. But, convinced likewise, and rightly, that the attention of the public, however robust one may suppose it to be, cannot be kept alive during five hours by music and drama alone, they have introduced into their five- or six-act operas all that the most active imagination has been able to conceive in the way of din and bustle and dazzle for the brutal over-excitement of the senses.

"The merit of the director of a great lyric theatre now consists in the greater or lesser ability with which he makes the public *endure* music when the music is beautiful, and prevents the same public from noticing when it is not worth anything.

"Alongside this system of speculation we have to place the pretensions of vocal artists who also aim at making money by every possible means. For the strange malady that seems to have taken possession of the entire flock of theatrical singers during the last few years, a malady every symptom of which you know, is not usually the result of a love of glory, emulation, pride, but the mean love of lucre, avarice, or the passion for luxury, the insatiable desire for material enjoyments. They want applause and hyperbolic eulogies, because these alone move the undecided crowd

and guide it in this direction or that. And it is the crowd that is invoked because it alone supplies the money. In that world they do not desire, as we would, money *for* music, but *from* music, and in spite of it. Hence the taste for tinsel, bombast, sonority above all, contempt for the primary qualities of style, the awful outrages inflicted on expression, common sense, and language, the destruction of rhythm, the introduction into singing of the most revolting stupidities, and the error of the big public that today naïvely believes that these are *essential conditions* of dramatic music, which it confuses with theatrical music. Even education is directed to the same end. You have no idea what certain masters teach their pupils; and, very rare exceptions apart, one may nowadays say that a teacher of singing is a man, a little more stupid than another man, who teaches the art of murdering good music and giving an appearance of life to bad music.

"As to the authors, poets, or musicians who write for the theatre, it is not in our day that one would find many (some are still to be met with, I admit) filled with a genuine respect for art. How many of them are capable of limiting themselves to the making of a few excellent but only moderately lucrative works, and preferring this modest and careful output to the constant exploitation of their talent, however exhausted it may be?—an exploitation comparable to that of a meadow mown and remown to its roots, without its products being given time to grow again. Whether one has ideas or not, one must write much and often; acts must be accumulated in order to secure rewards, authors' rights, capital, interest, to secure and absorb all that is capable of absorption, just like those infusory animalcules called *vortex*, which create an eddy in front of their ever-gaping mouths, so as continually to engulf the little bodies passing their way. And to justify themselves they modestly quote Voltaire and Walter Scott, who, however, did not grudge time or labour to bring their works to perfection.

"Others, without pretending to a fortune, to which so many consider themselves entitled nowadays, but contenting themselves with seeking a livelihood in art, do not hesitate to make a trade of the real talent they possess, and consequently scratch down to bed-rock a soil capable of producing fine fruits if it were wisely cultivated. This is less blameworthy, it is true; necessity is not the mother of art. But it is very deplorable also, for it is the

cause, not only as regards intelligent men, but as regards the enjoyments paid for by the public, of the most unfortunate results, the sellers only too frequently bringing shoddy to the market.

"In both cases there emerge simultaneously, from this inexorable and more or less hurried production, *formulas*, *manner*, *stereotype*, and *commonplace*, the clumsy enlacements of which cause all the works of masters of the same period, written under like conditions, to resemble one another. One finds it too long to wait for the birth of ideas and to seek fresh forms for them. One knows that by putting together notes or words in this or that fashion, combinations result that will be accepted by the public of the whole of Europe. Why, then, seek for other ways of putting them together? These combinations are merely the wrappers of ideas; it is sufficient to vary the colour of the labels, and the public will take some time to discover that the wrapper contains nothing. The important thing is not to produce a few good works, but numerous mediocre ones likely to succeed and *bring in quick returns*. The utmost extent of the public's tolerance has been gauged, and although its benignity, which very much resembles indifference, has gone far beyond the limits set by good sense and taste, one says: 'Let us go that far, pending the time when we can go further. Let us seek neither originality, nor the natural, nor probability, nor elegance, nor beauty; let not vulgarisms, platitudes, barbarisms, or pleonasms trouble us, if they are all written more promptly than works endowed with the opposite qualities. The public would not feel grateful to us for our sensitiveness. Let us gain time, for time is money, and money is everything.'—And so it is that, in works that are assuredly not without merit in other respects, the mockers are in a position to pick out incredible defects, which it would not have cost their author twenty minutes of attention to correct. But twenty minutes are possibly worth twenty francs, and for twenty francs one resigns oneself readily to tolerate the singing in the combat-septet in the third act of *Les Huguenots*: '*Quoi qu'il arrive ou qu'il advienne*'—a celebrated but not unique *mot*, which was recently the cause of my losing a somewhat considerable wager. Someone having assured me that it was not to be found in the work, and that no one would venture to sing so remarkable a naïveté at the Opéra, I maintained the contrary;

a bet ensued; the matter was looked into, and I lost. What is sung is: '*Quoi qu'il advienne ou qu'il arrive.*' "

(Roars of laughter from the guests. Alone Bacon, astonished, asks what there is to laugh at in the *mot*. The reader has already been forewarned that he was not a descendant of the Bacon who invented gunpowder.)

I resume: "These practices of the theatre extend their influence even to artists outside the theatres, whose impulses are of the highest, whose convictions are most sincere. Thus it is that we see some who, in order to attract applause, not only for themselves, but for the things they admire, do some truly dastardly deeds. Would you believe that for a great number of years, at the concerts of the Paris Conservatoire, the custom has been to join Beethoven's *Coriolan* overture on to the final chorus of *Christ on the Mount of Olives*? And why? Because, as the overture ends *smorzando* with a *pizzicato*, it was feared that it would meet with an insulting silence from the public, and the *éclat* of the peroration of the chorus was reckoned on to secure applause for Beethoven. Oh misery! Oh respect for the *claqueurs*! What if the parterre did not applaud this heroic inspiration, was that a reason for destroying the deep impression it had incontestably produced, and for presenting so offensive a hodge-podge, so burlesque an anachronism, as the coupling together of Coriolanus and Christ, the blending of the clamour of the Roman Forum with the choir of angels on Mount Sion? Pray notice also that the perpetrators of this wretched device miscalculated. I have heard elsewhere the *Coriolan* overture *courageously performed alone* and applauded twenty times more than ever was the chorus from *Christ on the Mount of Olives* that used to be added to it as a parachute at the Conservatoire. These examples, gentlemen, and many others that I refrain from quoting, bring me to a severe conclusion, but, to my thinking, a just one.

"Nowadays the theatre is to music . . . *sicut amori lupanar* (what a brothel is to love)."

"What does that mean?" exclaim Bacon and a few others. Corsino translates the second part of my comparison, which I have not dared to put into French. Thereupon follows a storm of plaudits, shouts, and ejaculations: "True, true!" and the glasses are

so violently brought down on the table as to be smashed to pieces. Impossible to secure a hearing during such a din.

"Hence, gentlemen, the warm affection we must ever show for theatrical compositions in which music is respected and passion nobly expressed, and which reveal good sense, naturalness, plain truth, grandeur without bombast, strength without brutality. They are respectable girls who have withstood the contagion of example. A work of good taste, really musical and dictated by the heart, in our days of exaggerations, vociferations, dislocations, mechanism, and mannequinism! We must adore it, cast a veil over its defects, and place it on so high a pedestal that the dirty splashings around it cannot reach it!

"It will be said to us: 'You are the Cato of a lost cause.' So be it, but this cause is an immortal one; the triumph of the other is but temporary, and the support of its deities will fail it sooner or later, together with the deities themselves.

"Hence also the contempt we must never conceal—one which you, I admit, barely hide—for the products of the low musical industry exposed on the theatrical butcher's stall.

"Hence again our duty never to set forth except in its most majestic beauty the music that is independent of scenic exigencies, free music—in a word, music. If it has to be more or less humiliated in the theatre, let her be all the prouder elsewhere. Yes, gentlemen! and it is here that I rally heart and soul to the opinion of your leader. The cause of great art, of pure and true art, is compromised by the theatre; but it will triumph in the theatre itself if artists defend it and fight for it energetically and constantly.

"The opinions of our judges vary, I admit; the interests of artists appear to be in opposition; a number of prejudices still flourish in the schools; the public taken as a whole is not very intelligent, but frivolous, unjust, indifferent, changeable. But its intelligence, which has become extinct or weakened regarding certain matters of our art, seems to develop in regard to others; its changeableness, which so frequently makes it modify its first verdict, compensates for its injustice; and if it exhibits the atrophy of the sense of expression in particular, it is the contemptible products of false art that have led to this. The frequent hearing of works rich in poetic and expressive qualities will doubtless succeed in reviving this apparently dead sense.

"Now, if we examine the position of artists in the social *milieu* in which they live, misfortune has often, it is true, persecuted and crushed inspired men, but it is not only the celebrities of our art and time that it has fastened on. Great musicians share the fate of almost all humanity's pioneers. We have had Beethoven isolated, not understood, disdained, poor; Mozart, for ever running after the necessities of life, humiliated by unworthy patrons, and leaving at his death nothing but six thousand francs of debts; and so with many others. But if we are desirous of looking alongside the musical domain, into that of poetry, for instance, we see Shakespeare, tired of the lukewarmness of his contemporaries, retiring to Stratford in the prime of his age, no longer wishing to hear mention of poems, dramas, or stage, and writing his epitaph to bequeath his curse on those who *disturb his bones*; we find Cervantes a cripple and poor, Tasso also poor and dying insane, through pride as well as through love, in a prison. Camoens was still more unfortunate. He was a warrior, an adventurous traveller, lover, and poet; he was intrepid and patient; he had inspiration and genius, or rather he belonged to genius, which made him its prey, dragged him palpitating through the world, gave him the strength to struggle against winds, tempests, obscurity, ingratitude, banishments, and pallid hunger with its hollow cheeks; bitter billows, which he courageously clove with his noble breast, raising above them with a sublime gesture his immortal poem. Then he died after long suffering, and without having ever had the opportunity of saying to himself: 'My country knows and appreciates me; it knows the man I am, it sees the glory of my name reflected on its own, it understands my work and admires it; I am happy to have come, seen, and conquered; thanks be given to the supreme power that gave me life!' No, far from that; he died lost amid the mass of those who suffer, the *gente dolorosa*, always armed and fighting, pouring out in floods his thoughts, his blood, and his tears; furious at his fate, furious at finding men so small, furious with himself for being so great, shaking with fury the heavy chain of material needs, *servo ognor fremente*. And when death claimed him, he must have gone out to meet it with the sad smile of the resigned slaves marching, under the eyes of Cæsar, to their last combat.

"Then only did glory come . . . glory! . . . O Falstaff! . . .

"Great musicians, then, are not the only ones that suffer.

"On the other hand, against these only too well established cases of misfortune are to be set off numerous examples of the brilliant and happy destinies of men eminent in art. They have been, they are, and they shall be. At any rate we who do not have any pretensions either to the role or to the fate of the Titans, let us acknowledge at least that our lot is fairly good. If our pleasures are few and far between, they are vivid and elevated. Their very rarity enhances their worth. An entire world of ideas and sensations is open to us, that adds an existence of luxury and poetry to the necessities of prosaic life, and we enjoy it with a happiness unknown to other men.

"There is no exaggeration here. These joys of the musician, more profound than all others, are really denied to the greater part of the human race. The arts, some of which appeal only to intelligence, while others are *deprived of movement*, can never produce anything comparable. Music (consider well what I mean by the word, and do not confuse things that have only the name in common), music, I say, speaks in the first instance to a sense that it charms, the excitation of which, spreading through the entire organism, produces a voluptuous feeling, now gentle and calm, now fiery and violent, which no one can imagine to be possible until he has experienced it. Music, by associating itself with ideas that it has a thousand means of engendering, increases the intensity of its action with all the power of what is styled poetry; already aflame itself, when expressing the passions, it appropriates their fire; sparkling with sonorous rays, it decomposes them in the prism of the imagination; it embraces at once the real and the ideal; as Jean-Jacques Rousseau said, it *makes silence speak*. By suspending the action of the rhythm that gives it movement and life, it can assume the aspect of death. In the harmonic devices in which it indulges, it might confine itself (it has done so only too frequently!) to being a pleasant diversion to the mind, or, in its melodic sport, a caressing of the ear. But when combining at one and the same time all its powers on the sense of hearing, it so skilfully charms or offends, excites the nervous system, accelerates the circulation of the blood, sets the brain afire, swells the heart and quickens its beat, enlarges thought beyond measure, and launches it into the realms of the infinite, thus acting in its true sphere—that is to say, on beings truly possessing the musical sense—then

its power is immense, and I do not know to what other it could be seriously compared. Then it is that we are gods, and if men on whom fortune has heaped its favours could understand our ecstasies and purchase them, they would scatter gold to share them for a moment.

"I therefore repeat the toast of your leader: To artists whom nothing can debase or dishearten, to true artists like yourselves, to artists who are persevering, valiant, and strong!"

Cheers burst forth once more, but this time in chorus and with a harmony full of pomp.

At the final cadence of this musical clamour, just when all the empty glasses are lowered and strike the table simultaneously, I make a sign to the waiter, who for some minutes past has been standing by the door. The Ganymede comes to me, his white apron tucked up under his left arm, his waistcoat adorned with an enormous nosegay, carrying on a tray a large and high dish-cover which seems to cover some dainty. He walks up to the brothers Kleiner, who are sitting together, places the tray in front of them, removes the cover, and the company sees that this unexpected present consists of TWO MILK-CHOCOLATES!

"At last, at last, at last!" is shouted crescendo from every part of the room. "Here is the proof, here we have it," squeaks little Schmidt as he jumps on the table; "here is the proof that with time and patience artists of courage end by getting the better of fate."

I slip out amid the tumult.

SECOND EPILOGUE

CORSINO'S LETTER TO THE AUTHOR—
THE AUTHOR'S REPLY TO CORSINO

*Beethoven and his Three Styles.—Inauguration of Beethoven's
Statue at Bonn.—Méhul's Biography.—London once more.—
The Purcell Commemoration.—St. James's Chapel.—
Madame Sontag.—Suicide of an Enemy of the Arts.—
Henri Heine's Mot.—A Fugue of Rossini's.—
Falstaff's Philosophy.—Mr. Conestabile and his Life of Paganini.—
The Adventures of William Wallace in New Zealand.—The End*



FTER having sent this book to all my friends of the orchestra at X, the edition became sold out, and I hoped, as may be seen from the prologue, that no more would be heard of it. I flattered myself. It is still spoken of. Authors always flatter themselves.

Here is a letter from that fantastic Corsino, a letter bristling with interrogation points and full of somewhat disagreeable remarks, to which I must needs reply categorically.

This correspondence obliges my publisher to issue a new and enlarged edition of *Evenings in the Orchestra*. For there are fifty musicians in the theatre at X, and it is beyond my strength to copy my letter fifty times. Just as I am preparing this second edition, M. Lévy¹ asks me whether I have not also some friends in Paris, and whether it would not be proper to increase for their benefit the number of copies to be printed.—“Of course,” I replied to him, “I possess many good friends, even in Paris; nevertheless I should not like to involve you in a heavy outlay. So pray act as if I had none.”—“And how about enemies?” he replied, with a smile that radiated hope. “Aha! there we have people of some use! They go so far as to purchase works regarding which they have intentions. . . . It would be funny, you admit, if, thanks to them, we succeeded in selling a few hundred copies of your *Evenings*, at a time when, in the matter of books sold, we reckon by tens only.”—“Enemies, I! Come now, you flatterer! No, I have no

¹ The original publisher, Calmann-Lévy. (E. N.)

enemies, not one, let me tell you. But as you are today a victim to this singular idea of printing me to an inordinate extent, act as if I had lots of them, and print as many copies of my book as you see fit; print, go on printing, and let the book be put on sale everywhere."

These final words recall in rather an unfortunate fashion a celebrated line in the scene of the little dogs in the comedy of *Les Plaideurs*. It is a mere nothing. Let me continue; or, rather, do not let me continue. Let me on the contrary reproduce at once the letter of my friend Corsino, try to clear myself of the charges he brings against me, and, by my reply, help him and his colleagues to conjure the pressing musical danger to which a poor composer is about to expose them.

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TO THE AUTHOR OF *EVENINGS IN THE ORCHESTRA*,
PARIS.

Dear Sir,

The artists of the *civilized town* have received your book. Some of them have even read it. Here is a résumé of what they think of it.

These gentlemen are of opinion that they do not figure in your book in a favourable light. They contend that you have committed an unqualified breach of trust in making known to the public their sayings and doings, their conversations, their poor jokes, and especially the liberties they take with mediocre works and mediocre virtuosi. To be frank, you treat them without ceremony. They never thought they were such intimate friends of yours.

As far as I am personally concerned, I can only thank you for having made me play a part that is pleasing to me, and that I think as original as it is true. None the less ridiculous shall I appear in the eyes of the literary men and musicians of Paris who will read you. But I don't care a fig. I am what I am; shame unto him who considers me silly!

Our tenor-god is furious to such a degree that he pretends that the mischievous things you write about him are *charming*. Seeking to prove his goodwill towards you, he was yesterday worrying

Baron F., our director, to put into rehearsal one of your operas, in which he claims to be able to fill the principal part to your entire satisfaction. And to his own, I presume, since if he were to do his best, he would butcher the opera without mercy. Happily I know this sort of vendetta, and I did not tolerate that you should become its victim here. I dissuaded His Excellency from accepting the proposal of the treacherous singer, and I replied to the latter's reproaches with a French proverb paraphrased for the occasion; I am sure he understood it, for he has kept quiet ever since:

*"Dis-moi ce que tu chantes et je te dirai qui tu hais."*² (Tell me what you sing, and I will tell you whom you hate)."

The baritone is pleased and altogether happy that, in the part of Don Giovanni, you considered him worthy of the Montyon prize. This appreciation flatters him more than I can tell you.

The prima donna of whom you wrote: *"we thought she was in labour!"* exclaimed bitterly: "At any rate, he will never be the father of my children." Here I cannot congratulate you, for she is an enchanting fool.

Both the Figaro and the Almoviva are, most happily, still ignorant of the opinion of them that you have attributed to me in your book. They are barely literate, but still, I believe they are able to read.

Moran, the horn-player, thinks that the pun made on his name is unworthy of you. I am of his opinion.

The player of the big drum, the only one of our colleagues who did not receive a copy of your work, borrowed that of Schmidt, who was not using it, and read it attentively. He was hurt at the ironical tone in which you speak of him; still, he allowed himself but one remark. "The author," he said to me, "gives an untrustworthy account of my affair with our director concerning the six bottles of wine he sent me last winter by way of encouragement. It is true that I told him I did not require any encouragement, but I took good care not to return him the bottles."

Our conductor seems thinner since you pointed out the *leaps of his stomach*. It is plain that he wears stays. He is somewhat pleased with you.

² The proverb referred to is: *"Dis-moi qui tu hantes et je te dirai qui tu es"*; literally, "Tell me whom you frequent, and I will tell you who you are." The English equivalent is: "Birds of a feather flock together." (Translator's note.)

The brothers Kleiner have just got married; they have taken as wives two Bavarian girls. They have always kept a most pleasant recollection of the *bavaroises* you so handsomely treated them to on the night of our farewell dinner. They thought they had now reached the end of their *worries*, but there remained one more for them to endure; their father died. For rest, your book did not entertain them much; they have read only ten pages of it.

Bacon is vainly trying to discover why you twice inform the reader that he is not descended from the Bacon who invented gunpowder.

Lastly, Dimsky, Dervinck, Turuth, Siedler, and myself, I confess, we are hanged if we know what you meant by the portion of your speech in which you mention Camoens: "Then only did glory come . . . glory! . . . O Falstaff!"

Who is Falstaff? What has he in common with Camoens? Whence does this strange name come? Is it that of a poet? or a warrior? I lose myself, they lose themselves, we lose ourselves in conjectures.

Most important and final questions. We have just performed a charming opera translated from the English, entitled *Maritana*; the author's name is Wallace. Do you know him?

An Italian pamphlet on Paganini came our way lately. It completes your life of this great virtuoso. But you are sadly mishandled in it. Have you seen it?

Adieu, dear sir; pending your next visit, pray be good enough to reply to me at full length, with a letter it will take two and a half hours to read. It will be precious to us for the first performance of *Angélique et Roland*, a very dull opera that we are rehearsing at present, and the third act of which especially is terrible.

Your devoted and
co-fanatic musician,
CORSINO

.

THE AUTHOR'S REPLY TO M. CORSINO, First violin of the
orchestra of X.

My dear Corsino,

You scare me! An opera entitled *Angélique et Roland*, in 1852, and what is more, in three acts! And the part of *Angélique*

is doubtless played by the silly little pretty thing into whose bad graces I have fallen, that of Roland by the virtuous Don Giovanni, and that of Médor by my traitor-tenor? My poor friend, I can understand your sorrows, and I share them with you. Yes indeed, I pity you, and in spite of my aversion from long letters, I quite see that I must proportion the dimensions of the present one to the length of the *imminent* opera you mention. I must first introduce into it something that was not intended for you; one must leave no stone unturned! God grant that it may please you. It is a matter of Beethoven, and of a study of *his three styles* written by a Russian who is passionately fond of our art. In default of this book, which I regret being unable to send you, and which you, Corsino, must have sent to you from St. Petersburg sooner or later, our friends will be kind enough to content themselves with the analysis I have just made of it. It will be of service to you against the first act of *Angélique et Roland*. I have in stock some ammunition that can be used against the second act. Thanks to the questions you put to me, which I am quite prepared to answer, I hope also to help you to conquer the third, seemingly the toughest and cruellest. So at seven o'clock in the evening, after the overture to *Angélique et Roland* (since, after all, the overture must be played), you will read the following pages:

BEETHOVEN AND HIS THREE STYLES,

by M. W. de LENZ

Here is a book full of interest to musicians. It is written under the influence of an admiring passion that is explained and justified by its subject; nevertheless the author always preserves an open mind, seldom to be met with among critics, a quality enabling him to rationalize his admiration, to censure occasionally, and to see the spots on his sun.

M. de Lenz, like M. Oulibischeff, the author of a biography of Mozart, is a Russian. I must point out by the way that among the thoughtful works of musical criticism published during the past ten years, two have come to us from Russia.

I shall have much to praise in the work of M. de Lenz, and that

is why I wish to deal immediately with the reproaches he seems to me to have brought on himself through his book. The first one has to do with the many German quotations with which the text bristles. Why did he not translate these fragments into French, since the bulk of the book is in French? As a Russian, M. de Lenz speaks a number of known and unknown languages, and he probably said to himself: "Who is there who does not know German?" just like the banker who was wont to say: "Who has not a million?" Alas, we French do not speak German, we who have so much trouble in learning our own language and who so seldom succeed in knowing it. It is consequently most unpleasant for us to read with feverish interest the pages of a book and stumble at every moment into traps like the following: Beethoven says to M. Rellstab: "*Opern, wie Don Juan und Figaro, konnte ich nicht componiren. Dagegen habe ich ein Widerwillen.*" Well, what did Beethoven say? I should like to know. It is annoying. But I am wrong in selecting this German quotation, since the author has by way of exception given himself the trouble of translating it, a thing he has not done with a crowd of other words, sentences, stories, and documents, the meaning of which it is undoubtedly necessary that the reader should know. I rather like Shakspeare's way; in *Henry IV*, instead of giving the reply of a Welshwoman to her English husband, he puts these words in parenthesis: "*(She speaks Welsh to him).*"

My second reproach deals with an opinion pronounced by the author concerning Mendelssohn, one already uttered by other critics; and I shall request M. de Lenz's leave to discuss the reasons with him.

"Modern music," he says, "cannot be mentioned without naming Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. . . . We share as much as anyone in the respect which a talent of that worth commands, but we think that the Hebraic element discernible in Mendelssohn's thinking will prevent his music from becoming the property of the whole world, without distinction of time or place."

Is not a certain prejudice displayed in this manner of appreciating that great composer, and would M. de Lenz have written these lines had he been ignorant of the fact that the composer of *St. Paul* and *Elijah* was a descendant of the celebrated Israelite Moses Mendelssohn? I can with difficulty believe it. "The psalmodes

of the synagogue," he goes on to say, "are the types of what is found in Mendelssohn's music." Now, it is difficult to conceive how these psalmodes of the synagogue can have influenced the musical style of Felix Mendelssohn, since he never professed the Jewish creed; the whole world knows he was a Lutheran, and a fervent and earnest one.

Moreover, which music is it that can ever become *the property of the whole world, without distinction of time or place?* None, assuredly. The works of the great German masters such as Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, who all belonged to the catholic—that is, universal—religion, will no more attain this than the others, however admirably beautiful, living, sound, and powerful they may be.

Setting aside this question of Judaism, which, it seems to me, is raised needlessly, the musical worth of Felix Mendelssohn, the nature of his mind, his filial love of Handel and Bach, the education he received at the hands of Zelter, his somewhat exclusive sympathies with German life and the German hearth, his exquisite sentiment, his tendency to enclose himself within the circle of the ideas of a given town or public, are valued by M. de Lenz with great insight and nicety. From the comparison he institutes in the same chapter between Weber, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven he draws conclusions that seem to me accurate in every respect. He likewise ventures to say some most sensible things about the fugue and the fugal style, the reality of their musical importance, the use made of them by the true masters, and the ridiculous abuse of them by musicians whose constant preoccupation is with this style. He quotes in support of this theory the opinion of a consummate contrapuntist who has spent his life in the study of fugue, who might therefore have found the more reason to see in it the sole means of salvation in music, but who preferred to speak the truth. "It is," says M. de Lenz, "too honourable an exception to the exclusive ideas of the profession for us not to do the reader [who knows German] the service of reproducing it. It occurs in an article by M. Fuchs, of St. Petersburg: '*Die Fuge, als ein für sich abgeschlossenes Musikstück,*'" etc., etc. (He speaks Welsh.)

Well, I would give a great deal at the present moment to know what Fuchs said on the subject, but I am compelled to give it up. . . .

After having established some most ingenious comparisons between Beethoven and the great German masters who were his predecessors and contemporaries, M. de Lenz devotes himself to the study of his hero's character, the analysis of his works, and lastly the qualities distinctive of the three styles in which Beethoven wrote. This task was a difficult one, but we can have nothing but praise for the manner in which the author has accomplished it. It is impossible to enter better into the spirit of all those marvellous musical poems, better to embrace the ensemble and the details, to follow with greater vigour the eagle's impetuous flight, to discern more clearly when he rises or descends, or to say so more frankly. In my opinion, M. de Lenz enjoys in this respect a double advantage over M. Oulibischeff, for he does full justice to Mozart, while M. Oulibischeff is far from being fair to Beethoven. M. de Lenz unhesitatingly admits that various works of Beethoven, such as the overture to *The Ruins of Athens* and certain portions of his piano sonatas, are weak and hardly worthy of him; that other compositions, which, it is true, are hardly known, are absolutely lacking in ideas; and lastly that some two or three appear to him to be logogriphs; while M. Oulibischeff admires everything in Mozart. And yet heaven knows if the glory of *Don Giovanni* would have suffered from the destruction of so many of his childhood's compositions that were impiously published! M. Oulibischeff would like to draw a magic circle round Mozart; he does not seem to endure with composure the mention of other masters. M. de Lenz is full of genuine enthusiasm for all beautiful manifestations of art, and his passion for Beethoven, although not blind, is perhaps deeper and more vivid than that of his rival for Mozart.

The tireless researches to which he devoted himself throughout Europe for twenty years have brought him much curious information, little known to the general public, about Beethoven and his works. Some of the anecdotes he tells are precious, in that they explain the musical anomalies that are scattered through the works of the great composer, and which it had been sought in vain to understand till now.

Beethoven, it is known, professed a vigorous admiration for those masters of austere mien of whom M. de Lenz speaks, who made an exclusive use in music of that *purely rational element of human thought which could never fill the place of grace*. Do we

really know what he admired, and to what extent? I doubt it. It rather reminds me of the taste of those wealthy gastronomes who, tired of their Lucullus feasts, delight in breakfasting from time to time off a red herring and a buckwheat cake.

M. de Lenz relates that Beethoven, when taking one day a stroll with his friend Schindler, said to him: "I have found two themes for overtures. One lends itself to treatment in my own style, the other suits Handel's manner; which do you advise me to choose?" Schindler (can it be credited?) advised him to take the latter one. This advice pleased Beethoven because of his predilection for Handel; so unfortunately he followed Schindler's advice, and was not long in regretting he had done so. It is even alleged that he was vexed with Schindler for having given it him. And indeed Handel's overtures do not constitute the most striking part of his work, and to compare them with those of Beethoven is to compare a forest of cedars with a mushroom bed.

"This overture, op. 124,"³ says M. de Lenz, "is not a double fugue, as alleged. We must suppose that the theme that Beethoven would have treated in his own style would have become the occasion for a far more important work [yes, indeed, this must be supposed!], at a period when the genius of the artist was at its apogee, and the man in him was enjoying his last days free from physical sufferings. Schindler should have said to himself that the genius of Beethoven reigned unrivalled in the free symphonic style; that in that line it was unnecessary for him to be anyone's imitator; that the severe style, on the contrary, was at most a gate for him to clear; that he was not at home in it. The overture did not produce any effect; it was even described as unperformable, and *perhaps* it is."

The overture is indeed difficult, would be my answer to M. de Lenz, but it is quite performable by a fine orchestra. Owing to the many flashes of Beethoven's style that come through the coarse web of the Handelian imitation, the entire coda and several other passages move the hearer and carry him away when they are properly played. I have conducted two performances of this overture; the first took place at the Conservatoire with an orchestra of the first rank. There the style of Handel's overtures was so badly reproduced that the work was rapturously applauded. Ten

³ The *Weihe des Hauses* overture. (E. N.)

years later, when poorly performed by a too weak orchestra, it was severely criticized, it being admitted that Handel's style had been perfectly imitated in it.

M. de Lenz cites at this point Beethoven's conversation with Schindler on the subject: "*Wie kommen Sie wieder auf die alte Geschichte?*" etc. (He speaks Welsh.)

In this minute and intelligent review of the works of the great composer the story of the outrages committed on them was bound to have a place; the story is indeed told, but is most incomplete. M. de Lenz, who handles Beethoven's correctors so roughly, makes game of them, and flagellates them, has never known a quarter of their misdeeds. It is necessary to have been for a long time in Paris and London to know the extent of their ravages.

As to the alleged engraving mistake that M. de Lenz believes to exist in the Scherzo of the Symphony in C minor, and consisting, according to the critics supporting that thesis, in the inopportune repetition of two bars of the theme at its reappearance in the middle of the movement, I can say this much: In the first place, there is no exact repetition of the four notes, C, E, D, F, of which the melodic design is composed; the first time they are written as minims followed by a crotchet, and the second time as crotchets followed by a crotchet rest, which alters the character of the passage.

Besides, the adding of the two disputed measures is not in the least an anomaly in Beethoven's style. There are not merely a hundred, but a thousand examples of similar caprices in his compositions. The fact that the two added bars destroy the symmetry of the phrase was not sufficient reason for him to refrain from writing them had the idea entered his mind. No one has cared less than he for what is known as *squareness*. There is even a striking example of his audacity in this respect in the second part of the first movement of that same symphony, on page 36 of the little score published by Breitkopf and Härtel, where a bar of silence, which seems superfluous, destroys the rhythmic regularity, and makes the re-entry of the orchestra a ticklish matter of ensemble.

Now, I shall have no trouble in proving that this elongation of Beethoven's melody was done with a certain intention as regards form. The proof lies in the fact that this same melody, when

reproduced a second time, immediately after the organ point, also contains *two supplementary bars* (D, C sharp, D, C natural), of which no one says a word; these bars differ from those it is sought to suppress, and are added this time after the fourth bar of the theme, whereas the other two are introduced into the phrase after the third bar. The totality of the period is thus composed of two phrases of ten bars each; there was, therefore, an evident intention on Beethoven's part in this double addition, and *its consequence is even symmetry*, a symmetry that ceases to exist if we suppress the two contested bars while retaining the two others which are not the subject of attack. The effect of this passage in the scherzo is not in the least disagreeable; on the contrary, I confess I like it greatly. The symphony is performed on these lines in all corners of the globe where the great works of Beethoven are heard. All the editions of the score and the parts contain these two bars. Finally, when, in 1850, apropos of the execution of this masterpiece at one of the concerts of the Philharmonic Society of Paris, a newspaper censured me for not suppressing them, since it looked upon this error in engraving as a fact known to all, I received a few days later a letter from Mr. Schindler. Now, Mr. Schindler's purpose in writing was to thank me for *not* having made that correction; Mr. Schindler, who spent his life with Beethoven, does not believe in a mistake in the engraving, and he assured me that he had heard the two famous bars in every performance of the symphony that had taken place *under Beethoven himself*. Is it to be imagined that the composer, had he detected an error there, would not have corrected it immediately?

Whether, in the last years of his life, he altered his opinion in the matter, I am unable to say.

M. de Lenz, who is otherwise very moderate in the discussion, loses his sang-froid when he comes into collision with the absurdities that are still and will ever and everywhere be written about Beethoven's masterpieces. On occasions of this kind all his philosophy forsakes him; he gets angry, he is wretched, he once more becomes an adolescent. Alas, I may confess, in this field I myself had hardly emerged from childhood but a few years ago; but nowadays I no longer allow myself to be irritated. I have read and heard so many extraordinary things, not only in France, but even in Germany, on Beethoven and the noblest productions of his

genius, that nothing of that sort can now disturb me. I even think I can understand fairly exactly the divers causes that bring about this conflict of opinions.

The impressions of music are fugitive and quickly obliterated. Now, when a musical work is really new, it requires more time to exercise a powerful influence on the organs of certain of its hearers, and leave in their mind a clear perception of this action. It attains this result only by dint of acting upon them again in the same fashion, striking again and again in the same spot. Operas written in a new style are more promptly appreciated than concert works, whatever may be the originality, even the eccentricity, of their style, and in spite of the distractions the accessories bring to bear on the hearer. The reason for this is very simple: an opera that does not fall flat at its first performance is always repeated several times in succession in the theatre that has just produced it; and the same thing occurs afterwards in twenty, thirty, forty other theatres, should it have met with any success. The hearer who, on listening to it for the first time, did not understand a single note of it, becomes familiar with it at a second performance, likes it more at the third, and ends by becoming passionately fond of the work which at first had been offensive to him.

This cannot happen with the symphonies that are given only at long intervals, which, instead of obliterating the bad impressions they have produced on their first appearance, give these impressions time to stabilize themselves and become doctrines, written theories, to which the talent of the writer professing them lends more or less authority according to the degree of impartiality he seems to introduce into his criticism, and the apparent wisdom of the counsels he gives the composer.

Frequency of performance therefore constitutes an essential condition for the redress of errors of opinion when it is a question of works conceived, like those of Beethoven, outside the musical habits of those who hear them.

But however frequent, excellent, and bewitching we may suppose these performances to be, of themselves they will not change the opinions either of dishonest men or of honest men to whom nature has absolutely denied the sense necessary for the perception of certain sensations and the understanding of a certain order of ideas. In vain do you say to them: "Admire this rising sun!"—

"What sun?" they will all say; "we don't see anything." And truly they do not see anything; some because they are blind, and others because they are gazing westward.

If we now approach the question of the qualities of performance necessary for the original, poetical, audacious works of the founders of dynasties in music, we have to recognize that these qualities must be so much the more excellent in proportion to the newness of the style of the work. It is often said: "The public does not notice slight inaccuracies, omitted or exaggerated nuances, errors of tempo, defects in ensemble, correctness, expression, or warmth." True, it is not offended by these imperfections, but then it remains cold, is not moved, and however delicate and graceful or great and beautiful the composer's idea may be, when it is thus veiled it passes by the public without the latter's perceiving its forms, for the public divines nothing.

It is therefore necessary, I repeat, that Beethoven's works should have frequent performances of irresistible power and beauty. Now there do not exist, I firmly believe, six places in the whole world where it is possible to hear, only six times a year, his symphonies worthily performed. In one place the orchestra is badly constituted, in another it is too weak in numbers, in yet another it is badly led, or the concert halls are inadequate, or the players have not the time to rehearse; in short, almost everywhere are to be found obstacles that, in the final analysis, have most disastrous results for these masterpieces.

As regards his sonatas, in spite of the untold number of persons to whom is given the name of pianists, I must once more confess that I do not know of six virtuosi able to play them faithfully, correctly, powerfully, poetically, without paralysing the verve of them, or extinguishing the ardour, the flame, the life that seethe in these extraordinary compositions; able to follow the capricious flight of the composer's thought, to dream, to meditate, to share his passion with him, and lastly to identify themselves with his inspiration and reproduce it unimpaired.

No, there are not six pianists in the world for the piano sonatas of Beethoven! His trios are more accessible. But his quartets! In all Europe how many quadruple virtuosi, four-person gods, are there who are capable of unveiling the mystery of the quartets? I dare not say. There were consequently many reasons for M. de

Lenz's not taking the trouble to reply to the divagations that the works of Beethoven have occasioned. A sort of unpopularity for these marvellous inspirations is an inevitable misfortune. And yet is it even a misfortune? I doubt it. It is perhaps better that such works should remain inaccessible to the crowd. There are talents replete with charm, brilliance, and power who are adapted, if not to the lower classes, at least to the "third estate" of intelligences; the splendid geniuses, such as Beethoven, were created by God for sovereign hearts and minds.

He himself was fully conscious of the strength and grandeur of his mission; his occasional outbursts leave no doubt as to this. One day, when his pupil Ries dared to point out to him in one of his new works a harmonic progression pronounced faulty by the theoreticians, Beethoven replied: "Who is it who forbids this?"—"Who? Why, Fuchs, Albrechtsberger, all the professors."—"Well, I permit it." On another occasion he remarked naïvely: "I am of an electric nature; that is why my music is so admirable!"

The famous Bettina relates in her correspondence that Beethoven one day said to her: "I have no friends; I am alone with myself; but I know that God is nearer to me in my art than He is to the others. I fear nothing for my music; it cannot have an adverse fate; he who will feel it fully will for ever be delivered from the worries that other men drag behind them."

M. de Lenz, when recording the peculiarities of Beethoven in his social intercourse, says that he was not always as uncouth as he was in the last years of his life—that he even attended balls, but that *he could not dance in step*. This seems to me a rather strong assertion, and I permit myself to doubt it. Beethoven possessed in the highest degree the sense of rhythm; and if it has really been said that he did not dance in step, it is because it was considered piquant to make this childish remark as an afterthought, and to record it as a curious anomaly. There are people who have pretended that Newton did not know arithmetic, and denied bravery to Napoleon.

Nevertheless it would seem, if we are to believe a considerable number of German musicians who have played Beethoven's symphonies under his leadership, that he was an indifferent conductor of his own works. There is nothing incredible in this; the conductor's talent is as specialized as that of the violinist; it is

acquired only by long practice, and only if one possesses in addition a very pronounced natural disposition for it. Beethoven was an able pianist, but a detestable violinist, although he had taken violin lessons in his childhood. It would have been possible for him to have played both instruments very badly, or even not to have been able to play either, without being, for that matter, any the less marvellous a composer.

It is commonly believed that he wrote with extreme rapidity. It even happened to him to improvise one of his masterpieces, the *Coriolan* overture, in a single night; generally speaking, however, he worked, remodelled, kneaded his ideas in such a fashion that the first sketch bore a very slight resemblance to the final form of the work. It is necessary to see his manuscripts to get an idea of this. He thrice rewrote the first movement of his Seventh Symphony. For several days he sought, while roaming in the fields near Vienna, the theme of the "Ode to Joy" that begins the finale of his choral symphony. The sketch for this passage has been preserved.

After the first phrase that came to Beethoven's mind, there is written in *French* the word *bad*. The modified melody reappears a few lines further down, accompanied by the remark, again in French: "This is better." Finally we have it in the form we admire, decisively elected by the two syllables which the stubborn seeker must have written with delight: "That's it!"

He worked for a considerable time at his Mass in D. He rewrote two or three times his opera *Fidelio*, for which, as is well known, he composed four overtures. The story of what he had to endure to have the opera performed, through the ill will and opposition of all his executants, from the first tenor down to the double-basses, would be sadly interesting, but it would carry us too far. However varied the vicissitudes of that work may have been, it has remained and will remain in the repertory of over thirty theatres in Europe, and its success would be greater, in spite of the many difficulties of performance it presents, were it not for the incontestable inconveniences of a melancholy drama the whole action of which takes place in a prison.

Beethoven, when carried away by the subject of *Leonora, or Conjugal Love*, saw in it only the sentiments it gave him the opportunity of expressing, and never took into account the sombre

monotony of the spectacle it presents. The libretto, of French origin, was first set to music in Paris by Gavaux. Later an Italian opera was made out of it for Paer, and it was after having heard in Vienna the music of the latter's *Leonora* that Beethoven had the naïve cruelty to say to him: "The subject of your opera pleases me; I must set it to music."

It would be interesting now to hear the three scores in succession.

I must stop; I have said, I hope, enough about M. de Lenz's book to inspire in Beethoven's admirers the desire to read it. I have only to add that, in addition to the excellent qualities he has displayed as critic and biographer, they will find in the catalogue and classification of the master's works a proof of the religious care with which M. de Lenz has made a study of everything connected with them, and of the learning that has guided him in his investigations.

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The pages I send you are unfortunately insufficient. I have just tested the matter, and find that they take only three-quarters of an hour to read. What, then, can I tell you in order to fill out the whole first act of your opera? Wait a bit—I have it. I remember a journey I made to Bonn, at the time of the fêtes organized for the inauguration of the Beethoven statue. This fits in pretty well with what precedes, so let us suppose now that the time is the day after the 14th of August 1845 and that I am writing to you from the banks of the Rhine.

Read:

SUPPLEMENT FOR ACT I

THE MUSICAL FÊTES AT BONN

König'swinter, 15 August

The fête is over; Beethoven stands in the square of Bonn, and already the children, heedless of all greatness, play at the base of his statue; his noble head is at the mercy of the wind and rain, while the mighty hand that wrote so many masterpieces serves

as a perch for common birds. Artillerymen are now engaged in sponging out the mouths of their guns, after so many salutes belched to the skies; the Quasimodos of the cathedral suffer their bells, tired of pealing "Hosannah!" to remain silent; students and carabineers have doffed their picturesque uniforms; the phalanx of singers and instrumentalists has dispersed; the throng of admirers, dazzled by the brilliancy of that glory, departs dreaming, to repeat to all the echoes of Europe with what great beatings of wings, with what sparks in its eyes, it swooped down on the city of Bonn to crown the image of the greatest of her sons.

Let us therefore hasten, before the inevitable moment comes when all cools down and is extinguished, when enthusiasm becomes traditional, when suns pass to the planetary state, let us hasten to record the pure and sincere piety of this vast assemblage, brought together on the banks of the Rhine with the sole object of doing homage to genius. Indeed, little labour had been spent to gather them there; the invitations addressed to foreign artists by the Bonn Committee were merely superficial courtesies, which did not even secure the guests any place whatever at the ceremonies. On the other hand the principal institutions in which music is taught in Europe, even those that have long lived and still live only by the works of Beethoven, showed, as will be seen, very little keenness about being represented; and almost all the artists, literary and learned men present had been moved to come only by the impulses of their personal sympathies and admiration. Perhaps we must congratulate ourselves on this and acknowledge that to this scarcity of official missionaries were due the warmth, the cordiality, the religious joy uniting all the members of this almost European meeting of the sons and friends of music. I say *almost* because of the absence, readily foreseen and understood, of the musicians of Italy. All the other nations, *truly initiated* into the cult of the art of sounds, were represented by mandataries, artists, critics, or amateurs, making the most original jumble.

There had come from Berlin: Their Majesties the King and Queen of Prussia, Meyerbeer, the Earl of Westmorland (the English Minister), Möser senior, Möser junior, Rellstab, Ganz, Bötticher, Mantius, Jenny Lind, and Tuczeck.

From Vienna: Fischhoff, Joseph Bacher, delegates from the Con-

servatoire, Prince Frederick of Austria, Wesque von Püttlingen, Holtz.

From Weimar: Chelard and Montag, representatives of the ducal chapel.

From Salzburg: Aloys Taux, director of the Mozarteum.

From Carlsruhe: Gassner, director of the ducal chapel.

From Darmstadt: Mangolt, director of the ducal chapel.

From Frankfurt: Guhr, director and Kapellmeister of the theatre; the Milles Kratki and Sachs.

From Cassel: Spohr, Kapellmeister, invited by the Bonn Committee.

From Stuttgart: Lindpaintner, Kapellmeister, and Pischek.

From Hohenzollern-Hechingen: Techlisbeck, Kapellmeister.

From Aix-la-Chapelle: Schindler.

From Cologne: the entire orchestra, invited by the Bonn Committee.

From Leipzig: Mlle Schloss.

From Paris: Félicien David, Massart, Léon Kreutzer, Vivier, Cuvillon, Hallé, Seghers, Burgmüller, Elwart, Sax; Mmes Viardot-Garcia and Seghers.

From Lyons: Georges Hainl, leader of the orchestra of the chief theatre.

From Brussels: Fétis senior, Blaes, Very, de Glimes, representatives of the Conservatoire of which Fétis is director; Mme Pleyel.

From The Hague: Verhulst, Kapellmeister.

From Liège: Daussoigne, director of the Conservatoire.

From Amsterdam: Franco-Mendès.

From London: H. M. Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, Moscheles, Sir George Smart, members of the Philharmonic Society, Oury; Mme Oury-Belleville.

From everywhere: Franz Liszt, the soul of the fête.

Among the missionaries of the press were seen Jules Janin, Fiorentino, Viardot, from Paris; Dr. Matew from Mayence; Fétis junior from Brussels; Davison, Gruneisen, Chorley, Hogarth, from London; Gretsche, editor-in-chief of the Russian newspaper, the *Abeille du Nord*, from St. Petersburg. Several of the most distinguished *littérateurs* of the English press also attended, but I was not able to gather their names.

The *conservatoires* and theatres of Naples, Milan, and Turin,

together with the Pope's Chapel, did not figure in any official character in this gathering of illustrious pilgrims. The reason is patent: Beethoven is an enemy in Italian eyes, and wherever his genius dominates and his inspiration has taken a hold on hearts, the Ausonian muse must consider herself humiliated and seek safety in flight. Italy, moreover, is conscious of its national fanaticism and consequently dreads the hostile fanaticism of the German school. It is sad to acknowledge that she was not altogether wrong in taking this into account and holding aloof.

But our own Conservatoire, the Paris Conservatoire, which is or ought to be imbued with altogether different ideas—what was it thinking of in not sending an official delegation to such a fête? And that the Société des Concerts, which for eighteen years has known no glory, no success, no life, in fact, but the glory, success, and life bestowed on it by the works of Beethoven, should likewise have wrapped itself in frigid reserve, as it did before when Liszt expressed the wish that it should give a solitary concert to help the project that we have just seen realized as the result of his efforts! What an enormity! Its principal members, headed by their chiefs, should have been the first to make their appearance at Bonn, just as it was its duty a few years ago, instead of replying by silence to the entreaties of Liszt, rather to forestall them and give not one, nor two, but ten concerts, if necessary, for the benefit of the Beethoven monument. Either this needs no demonstration, or gratitude and admiration are merely empty words.

Among the composers and leading personalities whose absence from Bonn astonished everyone, and whom doubtless only serious reasons can have kept away, are Spontini, Onslow, Auber, Halévy, Ambroise Thomas, Habeneck, Benedict, Mendelssohn, Marschner, Reissiger, R. Wagner, Pixis, Ferdinand Hiller, Schumann, Krebs, Louis Schlosser, Théodore Schlosser, the brothers Müller, Stephen Heller, Glinka, Hessens senior, Hessens junior, Snel, Bender, Nicolai, Erckl, the brothers Lachner, and the brothers Bohrer. One of the last-named (Antoine) was unfortunately detained in Paris by the anxiety caused him by the health of his daughter; had this consideration not held him back, he would have made the journey afoot, and slept in the open, rather than not appear at the gathering.

In spite of all these gaps, it is impossible to picture to oneself

the impression received by the latest comers on entering the concert hall on the first day. This collection of celebrated names, these great artists who had hastened spontaneously from various points of Germany, France, England, Scotland, Belgium, and the Netherlands; the expectation of the varied sensations all were about to experience; the respectful passion felt for the hero of the fête by the whole gathering; his melancholy portrait showing on the platform through the lights of a thousand candles; the immense hall, decorated with foliage and escutcheons bearing the titles of the many and varied works of Beethoven; the imposing majesty of the age and the talent of Spohr, who was to conduct the performances; the juvenile and inspired fervour of Liszt, who went through the ranks trying to stimulate the zeal of the lukewarm, rebuke the indifferent, and impart to all a little of his flame; the triple row of young women in white; and, more than all this, the exclamations crossing one another from one side of the hall to the other of friends seeing one another after three or four years of separation and now meeting again almost unawares in such a place, for the realization of such a dream! This was quite sufficient to engender the beautiful intoxication that art and poetry, and the noble passions that are their daughters, sometimes excite in us. And when the concert began, when the group of lovely voices, well trained and sure of themselves, raised its harmonious clamour, I can assure you that it needed a certain amount of will-power on the part of each of us to restrain the emotion he felt from overflowing.

The day's program, as may be conceived, contained nothing but Beethoven's music.

In a general way, the public had been inspired, as a result of the impression left upon the hearers by the preliminary tests, with exaggerated fears as to the qualities of the performance. From all that had been said to me I almost expected a musical debacle, or at the very least a most incomplete rendering of the master's works. Such was not the case; during the three concerts and on the day of the performance in church of the Mass in C, with a single exception only slight faults were to be detected; the chorus nearly always showed itself admirable in precision and ensemble, and the orchestra, though, it is true, weak in several respects, maintained itself at an average height that removed it as far from

inferior orchestras as from the heroic phalanxes of instrumentalists it is possible to form in Paris, London, Vienna, Brunswick, or Berlin. It occupied a position between a Roman or Florentine orchestra and that of the Société des Concerts of Paris. But this is precisely what the organizers of the fête were blamed for, and all thought that now or never was the time to have a royal, splendid, powerful, magnificent, unmatched orchestra, worthy of the father and sovereign master of modern instrumental music.

The thing would have been not only possible, but very easy; all that would have been necessary would have been to apply, six months ahead, to the leading instrumentalists of the large towns I have named, obtain at an early date (and I have no doubt that it could have been obtained) their positive assent, and keep well clear of narrow ideas of nationalism, which in circumstances of this kind can have only the most disastrous results, and which appear infinitely ridiculous to all right-minded people. Than that Spohr and Liszt, both of them Germans, should have been entrusted with the direction of the three concerts of this German celebration, nothing could have been more appropriate; but in order to form an orchestra as imposing by its mass as by the eminence of its virtuosi there should not have been the slightest hesitation in having recourse to all the musical nations. Would it have been a great misfortune if, for example, instead of the inadequate oboe-player who so poorly performed the soli in the symphonies, they had brought Veny or Verroust from Paris, or Barrett from London, or Evrat from Lyons, or any other of assured talent and excellent style? Far from doing that, they did not even dream of calling upon the clever instrumentalists who were in the audience. Massard, Cuvillon, Seghers, and Very would not, methinks, have disgraced the rather shabby ensemble of the violins; Blaes, one of the best known of clarinettists, was close at hand; Vivier would have felt highly honoured at being requested to play a horn part, while Georges Hainl, who, although he has risen to become an admirable orchestra-leader, has none the less remained a first-rate 'cellist, he, who had travelled one hundred and eighty leagues, forsaking his theatre and his pupils of Lyons, to come and bow down before Beethoven, would certainly not have refused to join forces with the eight or nine 'cellists who tried to struggle with the dozen double-basses. As to the latter, they were truly in good

hands, and I have rarely heard the outburst in the Scherzo of the C minor Symphony so vigorously and clearly played as by them. Yet Beethoven was worth being treated to the luxury of bringing Dragonetti from London, Durier from Paris, Müller from Darmstadt, and Schmidt from Brunswick. But to have formed the foundations in this style would have occasioned great exigencies for all the rest of the orchestra. It would then have been necessary to number Dorus among the flutes, Beerman among the clarinets, Villent and Beauman among the bassoons, Dieppo at the head of the trombones, Gallay at that of the horns, and so on; more than a score of our most astounding violins, violas, and 'cellos of the Conservatoire; and for Liszt's cantata they might even perhaps have succeeded in getting *one harp* (Parish-Alvars, for instance), so that it would not have been necessary to play the harp part on the piano, as they do in little provincial towns. To sum up, the orchestra, without being bad, did not come up either in size or in excellence to what the character of the festival, the name of Beethoven, and the riches of instrumental Europe gave us the right to expect.

The choir, in return, would have seemed to us fully equal to its task had the men's voices been sufficient in quantity and quality to balance those of the women. The tenors made several uncertain entrances; there was nothing with which one could reproach the basses; as to the one hundred and thirty sopranos, one was compelled to admit that outside of Germany one has no idea of such a women's chorus, its ensemble, its rich sonority, its fervour. It was composed wholly of young women and girls from the Bonn and Cologne musical societies, most of them excellent musicians, gifted with voices of good range, pure and resonant; they were invariably attentive, abstaining from chatting, simpering, and laughing as the women of our French choruses far too often do, and never lifting their eyes from their music except to look from time to time at the conductor's beat. Accordingly the effect of the upper parts of the chorus was perfectly beautiful, and the palm for the musical performance of Beethoven's works at these three concerts must by rights be awarded to the sopranos.

The *Messe solennelle* in D is written, like the Ninth Symphony, for chorus and four solo voices. Three of the soloists acquitted themselves creditably of their task in these vast compositions.

Mademoiselle Tuczek boldly approached the many dangerous high notes with which Beethoven has unfortunately studded the soprano parts in all his works. Her voice is brilliant and fresh, without possessing great agility; she was, I believe, the best that could have been found for this difficult and perilous part. Mademoiselle Schloss had no such unfavourable risks to encounter, the contralto part not being beyond the limits of her natural range. She has moreover made noticeable progress since the time I had the pleasure of hearing her in Leipzig, and today she may be considered one of the best singers in Europe, as much on account of the beauty, strength, and accuracy of her voice as for her musical sense and the excellence of her style. The tenor, whose name escapes me, seemed to me weak. The bass, Staudigl, well deserves his high reputation; he sings like a consummate musician, with a superb voice, of sufficient range for him to take on occasions the lower F and the high F sharp without hesitation.

The impression produced by the choral symphony was great and solemn; the first movement, with its gigantic proportions and the tragic accent of its style, the *Adagio*, an expression of so poetical regret, the Scherzo, enamelled with such lively colours and perfumed with such sweet rustic odours, in succession astonished, moved, and enraptured the assembly. In spite of the difficulties presented by the soprano part in the second half of the symphony, the ladies sang it with admirable verve and beauty of tone. The martial strophe with the tenor solo: "Like a hero who marches to victory!" was wanting in decision and distinctness. But the religious chorus: "*Prostrate yourselves, ye millions!*" burst forth imposing and strong as the voice of a multitude in a cathedral. It was of a stupendous majesty.

Spohr's tempi in this colossal work are the same as Habeneck's at the Paris Conservatoire, with the sole exception of the recitative for the double-basses, which Spohr takes much more quickly.

At the second concert, the immortal *Coriolan* overture was warmly applauded, in spite of its silent ending.

The canon in *Fidelio* is charming, but it appears a bit shortened away from the stage.

The air of Christ's archangel on the Mount of Olives, which

was well done by the orchestra and the chorus, calls for a more agile voice than that of Mademoiselle Tuczek if its vocalises and embellishments are to be sung without effort.

The E flat Concerto for piano is generally considered one of Beethoven's best productions. The first movement and the *Adagio* especially are of incomparable beauty. To say that Liszt played it, and that he played it in a grand, exquisite, poetical, and yet ever faithful manner, is merely to be guilty of a pleonasm: it evoked a hurricane of applause, and orchestral fanfares that must have been heard outside the hall. Then Liszt, advancing to the conductor's desk, directed the performance of the C minor Symphony, the Scherzo of which he gave us just as Beethoven wrote it, without cutting out the double-basses at the beginning, as was done for so long at the Paris Conservatoire, and playing the finale with the repeat indicated by Beethoven, a repeat that is still audaciously suppressed even nowadays at the concerts of the said Conservatoire. I have always had so much confidence in the taste of the correctors of the great masters that I was quite surprised to find the Symphony in C minor still more beautiful when executed integrally than when corrected. I had to go to Bonn to make this discovery.

The finale of *Fidelio* closed the concert; this magnificent ensemble did not have the vitalizing effect it always has on the stage, to which it owes its celebrity. I think that the weariness of the audience and orchestra had a good deal to do with this difference.

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The celebrations at an end, I went to collect my thoughts in a village whose quiet and peacefulness contrast strangely with the tumult that but yesterday reigned in the neighbouring town. It is Königswinter, situated on the other bank of the river, opposite Bonn. Its peasants are quite proud of the celebrity reflected on them. Several aged men claim to have known Beethoven in his youth. Crossing the river in a boat, he would frequently come in those days, they said, to muse and work in their plains. Beethoven had indeed a great love for the country-side; this sentiment has strongly influenced his style, and it occasionally makes itself felt even in those of his compositions the tendency of which is in nowise pastoral. He preserved to the end of his days the habit of

wandering alone through the fields, without taking into account the night's lodging he would need, forgetting to eat and sleep, and consequently paying scant attention to game-preserves and hunting-regulations. It is alleged in this connexion that one day, in the environs of Vienna, he was arrested by a gamekeeper who persisted in looking upon him as a poacher setting traps for quail in the field of full-grown wheat in which he was sitting. Already deaf at that time, and unable to make out the recriminations of the inflexible representative of public authority, the poor great man, with the naïveté common to celebrated poets and artists, who never doubt that their fame has penetrated even to the inferior ranks of society, shouted himself out of breath with repeating: "But I am Beethoven! You are mistaken! Leave me alone! I am Beethoven, I tell you!" And the official replied very much as he of the coasts of Brittany did when Victor Hugo, returning from a trip out to sea, a few leagues from Vannes, could not produce his passport: "What is it to me that you are Victor Hugo, literary man, and that you have written *Mon Cousin Raymond* or *Télémaque*! You have no passport, so come along with me, and no resistance, mind!"

I nearly missed hearing the mass in the cathedral on the second day, owing to the scant ceremony with which the committee treated all its invited guests, about whom it did not trouble itself in the least. It was impossible to get near the doors of the church, for the crowd was obstructing every approach to it, and the crush was disgraceful; it is in that mob that the pickpockets who had come from London and Paris must have made their finest hauls. Finally, remembering that there must be somewhere a stage entrance for the orchestra and chorus, I went in search of it, and thanks to a kind burgher of Bonn, a member of the committee, who, hearing me called by name, did not take me for the author of *Télémaque*, I managed to get in with my clothes intact. At the other end of the church fearful cries were making themselves heard; now and then one would have thought they were the clamours of a city being taken by assault. It was, however, possible to begin the mass, and I found the performance remarkable. This score, of a style less daring than that of the Mass in D, and conceived in proportions less vast, contains a number of very fine movements, and recalls in its character the best *messes solennelles* of Cherubini. It is

frank, vigorous, brilliant; there is even occasionally, from the point of view of the proper expression of the sacred text, an excess of vigour, movement, and brilliancy; but according to a widespread opinion the majority of the movements in this work were written by Beethoven for motets and hymns, and then adapted—with great skill, it is true—to the words of the divine service. Here again the sopranos of the choir did wonders, and they seemed to me to be better supported by the men's voices and the orchestra than at the previous performances. The clergy of Bonn, very fortunately less strict than the French clergy, had seen their way to allow women to sing at this religious celebration. I know full well that otherwise the performance of Beethoven's Mass would have been impossible; but this reason might have had little weight, in spite of the exceptional nature of the circumstances; in any case it would not have been thought worthy of consideration in Paris, where women are allowed to make themselves heard in the churches only on the express condition that they are neither singers nor musicians. For a long time it was possible to admire, at the services in the church of Sainte-Geneviève, a canticle sung by the ladies of the Sacred Heart to the air of: " 'Tis love, love, love," borrowed from the repertory of the Théâtre des Variétés; but female artists would not have been permitted to execute within the church's walls a hymn of Lesueur or Cherubini.

It would seem that in France, when our musical institutions or the influence they can have on our morals are in question, we take a genuine pleasure in not showing common sense.

Immediately after the Mass came the inauguration of the statue in the adjoining square. It was then especially that I had to make energetic use of my fists. Thanks to them, and by boldly climbing a barrier, I succeeded in securing a place in the reserved enclosure. Taking matters all in all, the invitation I received from the committee directing the Bonn fêtes did not actually prevent me from witnessing them. We remained there closely packed together for an hour, awaiting the arrival of the King and Queen of Prussia, the Queen of England, and Prince Albert, who, from the top of a balcony erected to receive them, were to assist at the ceremony. Their Majesties having made their appearance, guns and bells began their fanfares anew, while in a corner of the square a military band strove to secure a hearing for a few scraps of the

Egmont and *Fidelio* overtures. Silence having been nearly re-established, M. Breidenstein, the president of the committee, delivered a speech the effect of which on the audience may be compared with that doubtless obtained by Sophocles when reading his tragedies at the Olympic games. I beg M. Breidenstein's pardon for comparing him with the Greek poet, but the fact remains that only his immediate neighbours were able to hear him, and that his speech was lost on nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of his hearers. It was about the same with his cantata; even had the atmosphere been calm, I should not have grasped very much of that composition, for the impotence of vocal music in the open is notorious; but the wind blew violently towards the choristers, and my portion of M. Breidenstein's harmony was unjustly conveyed in its entirety to the spectators at the other end of the square, and these gluttons thought it was rather thin. A similar fate was reserved for the German song, selected by competition, and crowned by a jury which had probably heard it.

How can the authors of these works have entertained for a single moment any illusion regarding their reception? A score that is not executed may still pass as admirable—there are people whose business it is to build up a reputation for unknown works; but a work presented *in the open* and necessarily making no effect is always reputed mediocre and remains under the influence of this prejudice until such time as a becoming performance, *with closed doors*, allows the public, if there is good cause, to invalidate its first judgment. The sudden cessation of the animated conversation of the listeners who could not hear announced the end of the speeches and cantatas; thereupon everyone's attention was concentrated on the unveiling of the statue. When the monument was uncovered, applause, cheers, flourishes of trumpets, drum-rolls, volley-firing, pealing of bells, in fact all the enthusiastic noises that constitute the voice of glory among civilized nations, burst forth anew, and paid their respects to the statue of the great composer.

It is today that these thousands of men and women, young and old, who have spent so many pleasant hours with his works, whom he has so often carried away on the wings of his thought to the highest regions of poetry; these enthusiasts whom he has excited to the point of delirium; these humorists whom he has diverted by so many witty and unexpected caprices; these thinkers to whose

reveries he has opened immeasurable realms; these lovers whom he has moved by awakening in them the remembrance of the first days of their tender affection; these hearts, wrung by an unjust fate, to which his energetic accents have given strength for a momentary revolt, and which, rising in their indignation, have found a voice to mingle their screams of fury and grief with the furious accents of his orchestra; these religious souls to whom he has spoken of God; these nature-lovers for whom he has painted so faithfully the nonchalant and contemplative life of the countryside in the beautiful summer days, the terror of the hurricane, and the consoling ray threading its way through the tattered clouds to smile on the anxious shepherd and restore hope to the terrified tiller of the soil; it is now that all these intelligent and sensitive souls, on whom his genius has shed its radiance, turn to him as towards a benefactor and a friend. But it is too late; this Beethoven in bronze is unconscious of all these homages, and it is sad to think that the living Beethoven, whose memory is thus honoured, might perhaps not have obtained from his native town, in the days of suffering and destitution, of which there were so many during his troublous career, the ten-thousandth part of the sums lavishly spent on him after his death.

It is none the less fine to glorify in this fashion the demigods who are no more; it is fine not to make them wait too long; and we must thank the city of Bonn, and Liszt in particular, for having understood that the judgment of posterity on Beethoven had long since been given.

An immense final concert had been announced for nine o'clock of the following morning, so it was imperative to proceed thither at half past eight. The departures of the Kings and Queens, who were to be present and return to the château of Brühl in the course of the day, had, it is said, been the reason for this unseasonable hour. The hall was filled long before the appointed time, but their Majesties failed to appear. We respectfully waited for them a whole hour, after which it perforce became necessary to begin without them, and Liszt conducted the performance of his cantata. The orchestra and the choir, with the exception of the sopranos, gave this beautiful work with a slackness and inaccuracy that suggested ill will. The 'cellos in particular played an important passage in such a fashion that we could have believed

it to have been entrusted to a lot of pupils devoid of technique and experience; the tenors and the basses made several false, divided, or uncertain entries. And yet it was possible to see at once the great superiority of this composition to the ordinary "work written for the occasion," and even to what was expected from the great gifts of its composer. But hardly had the last chord been sounded when an extraordinary commotion at the entrance of the hall heralded the appearance of the royal families, and caused the audience to rise to its feet. Their Majesties Queen Victoria, the King and Queen of Prussia, Prince Albert, the Prince of Prussia, and their suites having taken their places in the vast box reserved for them on the right of the orchestra, Liszt bravely began his cantata over again. This is what you may call intelligence and sang-froid! He had there and then conducted with himself the following argument, of which experience proved the correctness: "The public will believe that I am beginning over again by the King's command, and I shall now be better performed, better listened to, and better understood." Nothing indeed could have been more dissimilar than these two performances of the same work with an interval of ten minutes between them. Just as the first one had been flabby and colourless, the second was accurate and full of life. The first had done duty as a rehearsal; doubtless also the presence of the royal families stimulated the zeal of the orchestra and the choristers and awed the evil-disposed who, in the mixed ranks of that musical army, had a short while ago tried to assert themselves.

It will be asked how and why there could be any ill will against Liszt, the eminent musician whose unquestionable superiority is, moreover, German, whose fame is immense, and whose generosity proverbial, who is justly credited with being the instigator of everything that has been successful at the Bonn Festival, who has scoured Europe in all directions, giving concerts the receipts of which were to be applied to cover the expenses of these fêtes, and who even offered to make good the loss should there be one; what other sentiments could exist in the crowd than those that conduct and merits like these must naturally inspire? Heavens! the crowd is always the same, especially in small towns. It was principally these merits and this noble conduct that gave them offence. Some had a grudge against Liszt because of his phenomenal talent and

exceptional successes, others because he is witty, and yet others because he is generous, because he has written too fine a cantata, because the other works composed for the festival and given the previous day were not a success, because he wears his hair instead of a peruke, because he speaks French too well, because he knows German too thoroughly, because he has too many friends, and doubtless because he has not enough enemies; and so on. The motives inspiring the opposition, it will be seen, are numerous and serious. However this may be, his cantata, really well performed and warmly applauded by three-quarters and a half of the house, is a great and beautiful thing, which at once places Liszt very high among composers. The expression is true, the accent just, the style elevated and novel, the plan well conceived and skilfully carried out, while its instrumentation is remarkable for its potency and variety. We never hear in his orchestra the succession of similar sonorities that make certain works, in other respects estimable enough, so tiring for the hearer; he knows how to make the right use of small and great means, he does not ask too much from either instruments or voices; in a word, he has demonstrated at one stroke that he has something one might be apprehensive of not yet finding in him so soon—*style* in instrumentation as in the other departments of music.

His cantata commences with a phrase with an interrogative accent, as called for by the sense of the first line of verse, and this theme, treated with rare ability in the course of the introduction, returns in the peroration in a fashion as happy as it is unexpected. Several choruses of the finest effect follow one another up to a decrescendo of the orchestra, which seems to call our attention to what is to follow. What comes next is assuredly very important, since it is the *adagio* with variations from Beethoven's B flat trio, which Liszt has had the happy idea of introducing at the end of his own cantata, to make of it a sort of hymn in glorification of the master. This hymn, presented at first in its native character of sad grandeur, bursts out finally with the majesty of an apotheosis; then the theme of the cantata reappears in dialogue between chorus and orchestra, and the cantata ends with an imposing ensemble. I repeat that Liszt's new work, vast in its dimensions, is truly beautiful in every respect; this opinion, which I express without any partiality for the author, is likewise that of the most

severe critics who were present at its performance; its success was complete and will become still greater.

The program of this concert was of a richness that may be called excessive; the duration of the items had not been properly calculated, and it was realized too late that it would not be possible to carry it out in its entirety. This is just what happened. At the very beginning the King, seeing at a glance that he could not remain to the end of so long a seance, had pointed out the pieces he wished to hear, after which he would leave. Royalty's will was complied with, and in conformity with it a sorting out took place, whence resulted the subjoined program:

(1) *Egmont* Overture, Beethoven; (2) Concerto for piano, Weber; (3) Aria from *Fidelio*, Beethoven; (4) Aria, Mendelssohn; (5) "*Adelaïde*," Beethoven.

The King of Prussia knows very well how to draw up programs. The *Egmont* overture was splendidly played; the coda, played with warmth by the orchestra, produced an electric effect. Madame Pleyel played with rare acuteness of perception and elegance the enchanting concerto of Weber. Mademoiselle Novello sang in a fine and imposing manner the beautiful aria from *Fidelio* with the obligato of three horns. Mademoiselle Schloss sang Mendelssohn's composition with great breadth of style, magnificent tone, and faultless intonation, and a true and well-felt expression. What a misfortune it is for composers of operas that this excellent songstress refuses to take up a dramatic career! She at any rate understands French perfectly, and I know of a great theatre to which she could render valuable service. I am unable to say as much of Mademoiselle Kratky; she sang that sweet elegy, "*Adelaïde*," one of the most touching of Beethoven's compositions, in a heavy, commonplace fashion, and always below the pitch. And Liszt was playing the piano accompaniment! One must have heard this work sung by Rubini, who had the traditions of it from Beethoven himself, to know all the dolorous tenderness and passionate languor it embodies.

After these pieces, their Majesties having taken their departure, it was decided to continue the carrying out of the program. M. Ganz, first 'cello of the Berlin Opera, played with considerable talent a fantasia on themes from *Don Giovanni*. Then young Möser, whose success at the Paris Conservatoire a year ago is

remembered, played a concertino of his own on themes of Weber. Whatever opinion may be held regarding his composition, it must be admitted that it would be impossible to have greater precision in the intonation, more purity of style, or more concentrated fervour; besides, M. Möser masters difficulties with as much felicity as aplomb; he is unquestionably at the present time one of the first violinists in Europe. His success, which could not be foreseen, for he played the entire piece amid the most profound silence, without any applause, without the slightest approving murmur, burst out suddenly; the bravos never ceased, and the youthful virtuoso was so surprised that in his joyous stupefaction he knew neither how to leave the platform nor what bearing to assume while remaining on it. Auguste Möser is a pupil of Charles de Bériot, who must be very proud of him. M. Franco-Mendès had had the unfortunate idea of insisting upon playing his 'cello solo, in spite of that of Ganz, who had preceded him, and the still more unlucky one of selecting as themes for his fantasia some arias from Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*; he consequently met with a very poor reception. And yet the air "*O mattutini albori*" is a very fragrant and poetic inspiration, and M. Franco-Mendès plays the 'cello delightfully; but he is a Dutchman and Rossini an Italian, hence the twofold anger of the perfervid German nationalists. This is deplorable, we have to admit.

There still remained to be performed an aria from Spohr's *Faust*, by Mademoiselle Sachs, a song of Haydn, by Staudigl, and a few choruses; but the seance had lasted nearly four hours, the audience filtered out without wanting to hear any more, and the flood swept me away. It is true I did not make any too desperate an effort to resist. Another concert was in store for me that evening. The King of Prussia had been graciously pleased to invite me to the one he was giving to his guests at the château of Brühl, and for more reasons than one I was most desirous of preserving sufficient strength to go and enjoy it.

On reaching Brühl amid fairy illuminations and a heavy down-pour of rain, I found another brilliant crowd to fight my way through with blunted arms. Spurs clanked on the great staircases; in every direction a scintillation of beautiful eyes, epaulets, white shoulders, decorations, heads of hair studded with pearls, golden helmets. I swear to you that the wearers of dress-coats

cut a sorry figure there. However, owing to the kindness of the King, who came and talked with them a few minutes and welcomed them as *old acquaintances*, places were found for them, and we were able to hear the concert. Meyerbeer was at the piano. A cantata he had just composed in honour of Queen Victoria was the first work given; it was sung by Mantius, Pischek, Staudigl, and Botticher, and the choir. It is ingenious, lively, and nervously laconic—a harmonious hurrah brilliantly launched. Mademoiselle Tuczek next sang a delicious romance from the opera *Il Torneo* by the Earl of Westmorland. Liszt played a couple of pieces—in his own style—and we heard for the first time the so highly belauded Jenny Lind, who has taken Berlin by storm. Hers is truly a talent vastly superior to what is heard today in French and German theatres. Her voice, of an incisive, metallic timbre, great power, and incredible suppleness, lends itself equally to half-tone effects, to impassioned expressions, and to the most delicate embellishments. Her talent is magnificently complete; yet, if we are to believe competent judges who admired her in Berlin, we could appreciate but one aspect of this talent, which requires the animation of the stage to reveal itself to its full extent. She sang the duet in the third act of the *Huguenots* with Staudigl, the finale of *Euryanthe*, and an aria (with chorus) of enchanting originality and freshness, strewn with unforeseen effects, piquant dialogues between chorus and soprano solo, of vibrating and distinguished harmony and coquettish and incisive melody, entitled on the program: *Niobe's Aria*, by Pacini. Never was there a happier mystification; it was a cavatina from Meyerbeer's *Camp de Silésie*. Pischek and Staudigl sang a duet from *Fidelio*; Pischek's voice is all that is beautiful and admirably emulated Staudigl's voice, the power of which I have already lauded. Pischek has the most perfect male timbre I know of. Add to this that he is young and handsome and that he sings with inexhaustible verve, and you will conceive the eagerness with which the King of Württemberg carried him off from the Frankfurt Theatre to attach him for life to his own chapel.

Madame Viardot-Garcia also sang three pieces with her usual exquisite method and poetic expression; they were a dainty cavatina by Charles de Bériot, the Hades scene from *Orfeo*, and a song of Handel—this last by request of the Queen of England,

who was aware of the superior fashion in which Madame Viardo can interpret the old Saxon master. Midnight was striking and "the falling stars were inviting sleep." I luckily found a place in a rail way coach to return to Bonn; I went to bed at one o'clock and slept till noon, dead drunk with harmony, wearied of admiring, giving way to an irresistible need of silence and quiet, and coveting already the cottage of Königswinter, where I now am and where I propose to muse for a few more days before returning to France.

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Do you not wonder at my memory, dear Corsino, and the facility with which I have been able, after seven years, to co-ordinate my recollections for this antedated narrative? The impression made on me by the Bonn festivities was so vivid and deep! I feel myself immersed in sadness, merely from having related it to you. Beethoven is no more! Our poetic world is a desert! No longer shall we find again the upheavals, the conflagrations of the soul, that were engendered in us by our first hearings of his symphonies! The beautiful realities of our youth seem to me dreams vanished for ever. Have spring and summer really existed for us? The cold, stormy wind blows day and night with such cruel persistence! No more green meadows, bubbling brooks, mysterious forests; no more azure in the sky; the grass is scorched the water frozen, the forest bare; leaves, flowers, and fruit have fallen, the cold earth has gathered them—and—soon—we shall follow them.

But pardon me, I am forgetting that I have to busy myself with your second hour of anguish. You got through the first one more or less successfully, did you not? When I say more or less successfully, I am wrong. Which one of you has cause to complain? During the entire first act of *Angélique et Roland* you had nothing but Beethoven!

Will you now have Méhul? Here is a short account I wrote of this classical composer, for the benefit of the Parisian artists. It may be perhaps suitable for your colleagues; since in the course of my travels I have often noticed how little biographical knowledge foreign artists have of our French masters of the great epoch.

Change your reader, for the first must be fatigued by now

FOR THE SECOND ACT

MÉHUL

It may appear singular to many people that anyone should take into his head, in 1852, to write in France a biography of Méhul. "What!" it will be said, "are the French so oblivious of their national glories that it is already necessary to recall to them who the author of *Euphrosyne* was, at what period he existed, the titles of his works, and the style of his compositions?" Fortunately not; we do not forget so quickly as that, and there are assuredly very few individuals among those who concerned themselves with music thirty years ago to whom we could tell anything new in this respect. But the present generation, the one which for fifteen or eighteen years has diligently frequented the Opéra-Comique, which has become accustomed to the ways of the modern muse of Paris, a muse of whom it can be said that her Pindus is the Butte Chaumont, and its Permessus the Bièvre River, were it not for the few pleasant works she has inspired; this generation, which is as ignorant of the musical world as La Fontaine's little mouse was of the universe, and, like it, takes mole-hills for Alps, is afraid of cockerels and full of sympathy for cats, consequently knows very little about Méhul. Without the concerts, where the overture to *La Chasse du jeune Henri* and the first aria from *Joseph* have occasionally been heard, and the posters of which have come under their eyes, it would hardly know this great master by reputation. These people never knew and will never know anything about Gluck and Mozart; they will even be ready to attribute *Don Giovanni* to Musard, who, it is true, made quadrilles of the themes of that opera. Only the erudite among them will know the existence of a *Don Giovanni* opera by Musard. But these amateurs must be forgiven; they go to the Opéra-Comique from time to time to take some relaxation. This they do by listening to more or less interesting plays in which the dialogue, written in their own language, is interspersed with bits of music more or less catching, or more or less . . . simple, the melody of which they retain with ease, since it is their own sort of melody. If by chance the melody, such as it is, is conspicuous in some work or other only

by its absence, in which case it is impossible for them to memorize it, they then enjoy the pleasure of believing in a *learned* music, and they give that title to the melody of this opera; they next get accustomed to it, such is their goodwill; they adopt it, and when speaking of the composer they no longer say just *So-and-so*, as they do of the composers they like, but *Monsieur So-and-so*. The former are their friends, the latter is a superior. No, this particular public must neither be attacked nor made fun of; it is a gem of a public, ever contented, ever merry, incapable of finding fault with anything at the Opéra-Comique, recalling at every first performance all the actors, all the authors, unless they are dead (and yet . . .); a public that does not offend and cannot be offended, which takes its pleasures where it finds them and even where it does not.

What seems to me unpardonable is the ignorance of the young musicians, or at any rate the young people who would like to be considered such. It is extremely imprudent of them not to learn something about the history of art; for they ought to reflect that among the people in good society with whom they have or will have intercourse, there are many who are tolerably well-informed of what they are ignorant of, and these erudite folk will not fail to humiliate them if opportunity offers. It would not cost them much more to learn the titles of the works of the great masters (I do not go so far as to ask them to know the works themselves) than to stuff their memory with so many shameful names, train it to retain what goes on daily in the dramatic houses of ill fame, and soil it with the many dirty meannesses among which they live and die, because they were born in their midst. No longer would be seen, as we see now, professors, laureates crowned and pensioned, attributing the *Mariage de Figaro* to Rossini, calling Gluck the author of *Didon*, believing that Piccini was a conductor at the Porte-Saint-Martin, knowing by heart and singing, or making their pupils sing, all the wretched music of the day, and not knowing eight bars of the masterpieces that constituted, constitute, and will ever constitute the true glory of European art.

I abstain from considering here what such a state of things might lead to; it would carry me too far. I will only say, without going back to the causes, that in general the historical ignorance of the young generation living in music, or around it, in Paris,

is deplorable, that it surpasses everything that can be conceived by way of analogy in literature or the graphic arts, and that one is compelled to reckon with it every time that an illustrious name that happens to have disappeared from the horizon for a few years makes its reappearance there. Then criticism should imagine that it is addressing readers brought up in Tasmania, at Borabora, or in the island of Ombay, and tell them that Napoleon was born in Corsica, an island surrounded on all sides by water; that he was a great captain who won a number of battles, among which Fontenoy must not be reckoned; that he was actually Emperor of the French and King of Italy, and not Marquis de Buonaparte, a general in the army of His Majesty Louis XVIII, as certain historians have asserted.

We shall consequently repeat, when dealing with Méhul, some ancient anecdotes that all civilized musicians and amateurs of music know very well, but which, for thousands of young barbarians, are downright *new news*.

It is to these people, then, that I address myself when I say: Méhul is a celebrated French composer. I have heard, in the provinces, *clever* amateurs number him among the German masters and assert that his name should be pronounced Méhoul, and not Méhul, but this is an error. Recent and conscientious inquiries have convinced me that Méhul was born at Givet, in the department of the Ardennes; a French department, be assured. I am unable to give the precise date of his birth, as I have not personally examined the register of births at Givet. MM. Fétis and Choron, his biographers, agree that he was born in 1763, but M. Fétis says positively that the date was the 24th of June, while Choron, disdaining such detail, says nothing about it at all. The former permanent secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut, M. Quatremère de Quincy, has written a paper on Méhul in which he tells us that his father was an inspector of the fortifications of Charlemont. There are various ways of dealing with truth, and this assertion of M. Quatremère is proof of it. The father of Méhul was an ordinary cook, who, very much later, when his son had acquired fame, owed to the latter's influence the subordinate post he held, the title of which, announced at a public sitting of the Institut, undoubtedly sounded better than

the other and, moreover has a lustre of its own and a slight scientific varnish that is rather flattering.

A poor blind organist gave young Méhul his first lessons in music, and the progress made by the child was rapid enough for him to be appointed, at the age of ten, organist in the church of the Récollets at Givet.

A fortunate circumstance having brought a German musician of merit, Wilhelm Hauser, to reside at the Abbaye de Lavaldieu, in the department of Ardennes, not far from Givet, little Méhul succeeded in getting himself adopted as a pupil by him. In fact he became a boarder at the Abbaye. His parents thereupon hoped that he would become a monk; and this might have happened had it not been for the colonel of a regiment garrisoned at Charlemont, who, having a presentiment of what the young organist would be some day, persuaded him to go to Paris with him. I do not know how long he had been there, very likely struggling with something near to poverty, when a rather singular incident brought him into contact with a master far more learned and a patron far more powerful than those he had had up to that time. I have this information from a frequenter of the Opéra, an intimate friend of old Gardel (the famous ballet-master of that theatre), who had been well acquainted with the principal character in the scene I am about to relate to you.

There was in Paris at the time a German composer named Gluck (pronounce Glouck), whose works engrossed public attention to a degree you cannot conceive. Believe me, I beg you, but anyhow it is a fact that alone he was more glorious, more admired, and more admirable than three popular composers taken together would be today, not to say three members of the Institut. And yet this Gluck had so far written only a very small number of works for the Opéra; at that time scores were not so plentiful as pence. He had just finished one called *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which you have probably never heard mentioned, but which excited none the less in Paris an enthusiasm greater than all the preceding productions of this same Gluck had done, and for which, even today, many people feel one of those fierce passions that would terrify you were you to witness them. Needless to give you the reasons of this anomaly.

Well, then, Méhul, having crept in, I know not how, for the rehearsal of this *Iphigenia in Tauris*, was so struck by what he heard, so moved, so disturbed, that he wished at all hazards to hear the first performance, on the following day. But how was he to manage it? All the tickets were sold; besides, Méhul, being a young composer, had not a single copper. So he conceived the idea of hiding at the back of a box, hoping to remain there undetected till the following night, and so be inside the theatre at the solemn hour. Unfortunately an inspector of the house found him in his hiding-place, spoke to him sharply, and was about to show him the door. Gluck was still in the proscenium, engaged in settling a few details of the ballet of the Scythians (an extraordinary piece, which you do not know), for this devil of a man meddled with everything; he insisted that not only the words, but the staging, the dancing, the costumes, and everything else should be in complete agreement with his music, and he worried the life out of everybody with that object. We have long since risen superior to such ideas, have we not? However this may be, the altercation in the box having attracted Gluck's attention, he inquired the cause of it. Thereupon Méhul came forward tremblingly and explained matters, addressing the great master as *Monseigneur*. At bottom this Gluck was a good-hearted man, in spite of the fact that he had wit, genius, and an iron will, and had accomplished a musical revolution. He was touched by the enthusiasm of the young intruder, promised him a ticket for the first performance of *Iphigenia*, pressed him to come and visit him, being desirous, as he said, he, Gluck, of making Méhul's acquaintance. You can guess the rest and conceive the influence that the advice of such a man must have exercised over the talent of his protégé; for this Gluck, I repeat, was truly a composer of great merit, and what is more, a *Knight*, and very wealthy, which, to you people, must be superabundant proof of the greatness of his worth.

There is hardly anyone who would nowadays spend more than two hours in a box, without food or drink, for the purpose of hearing a masterpiece. The reason no doubt is that masterpieces were formerly scarce, or else that there are very few Méhuls now. As to the *Monseigneur*, it has fallen into complete disuse. When speaking to an illustrious composer, one rather says *old fellow*. It is true that *seigneur* comes from *senior*, the comparative of the

Latin word *senex* (old); hence the expressions *my elder*, *my ancient*, *my senior*, *my old fellow*. The respect is just as deep; it is merely expressed in a different way.

It was under Gluck's direction that Méhul then wrote, as studies only and without entertaining the idea of ever having them performed, three operas: *Psyche*, *Anacreon*, and *Lausus and Lydia*. Nowadays when one has written three romances with the intention of publishing them, one begins to believe oneself possessor of an indisputable right to the attention of the directors of lyric theatres.

Méhul was twenty when he presented to the examining committee of the Opéra a serious score: *Alonzo and Cora*. Marmontel's *Incas* had no doubt supplied the subject of the poem. *Cora* was accepted, but not performed; and when at the end of six years the young composer saw that he was no better off in this direction than at the beginning, he addressed himself to the Opéra-Comique and submitted to it a three-act opera of ordinary life, *Euphrosyne and Coradin*, of which, if I am not mistaken, Hoffmann had written the story; it brought Méhul a striking success for his début. It was fortunate for him that he had not succeeded in having his first opera staged; for it is said that when, after the triumph of *Euphrosyne*, the Royal Academy of Music made up its mind to produce *Cora*, which it had kept pigeon-holed for so long, this pale and frigid work had no success.

In spite of the considerable number of beautiful and charming works succeeding it, I must fain admit that *Euphrosyne and Coradin* has remained for me the masterpiece of its author. It has grace, delicacy, brilliancy, plenty of dramatic movement, and passionate outbursts of fearful violence and veracity. The character of Euphrosyne is delightful, that of the physician Alibour of a rather bantering geniality; as to the rugged knight Coradin, all he sings is magnificently fiery. In this work, which appeared in 1790, and is still radiant with life and youth, I shall content myself with quoting by the way the physician's aria: "When the Count sits down to dinner"; that of the same personage: "Minerva, O divine wisdom!"; the quartet for three sopranos and a bass, in which appears very felicitously the often-repeated theme: "Dear sisters, leave me to act"; and the prodigious duet: "Beware of jealousy," which has remained the most terrible example of what music coupled with dramatic action can accomplish in the expression

of passion. This astounding piece is the worthy paraphrase of Iago's speech: "Beware of jealousy, the green-eyed monster," in the *Othello* of Shakspeare, a great English poet who lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth. It is told that at the general rehearsal of *Euphrosyne*, Grétry (you know, Grétry, an ancient composer born in Liège, in Belgium, whose wittily melodious work, *Le Tableau parlant*, has just been put on again by the Paris Opéra-Comique); it is told, I say, that after having heard the jealousy duet Grétry exclaimed: "It is enough to break the roof open with the skulls of the audience!" and the *mot* is not excessive. The first time I heard *Euphrosyne*, twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, I was the cause of a strange scandal at the Théâtre Feydeau, by reason of a fearful scream I was unable to restrain at the peroration of the duet: "Ingrate, I have breathed into your soul!" As little credence is given in theatres to emotions as naïvely violent as mine was, Gavaudan, who was then playing the part of Coradin, in which he excelled, had no doubt this was an attempt to mock him by means of an unbecoming farce; and he made his exit in a temper. None the less, he had never produced a more genuine effect. Actors frequently deceive themselves in the inverse sense.

Very powerful voices are needed to perform this duet. I should like to hear Mademoiselle Cruvelli and Massol in it. A little later Méhul wrote *Stratonice*, in which he had to depict the sufferings of the great concentrated love that kills. From this work I must cite first of all the overture; a charming invocation to Venus—the song: "Pour out all your sorrows"; the quartet of the consultation ("I tremble, my heart palpitates"), during which the physician Erasistratus, at the sight of the deep emotion the dying Antiochus feels at Stratonice's presence, discovers the passion of the young prince for her, and recognizes the cause of his illness; and again the beautiful aria of Erasistratus, and the last phrase, so true and touching, of King Seleucus:

*Accepte de ma main ta chère Stratonice,
Et par le prix du sacrifice
Juge de tout l'amour que ton père a pour toi!*

After having written *Horatius Cocles*; *La Jeune Sage et le vieux Fou*, a sort of petty vaudeville; *Doria*, nowadays unknown; *Adrien*, a fine unpublished score (we have a manuscript of it in

the library of the Conservatoire); *Phrosine et Mélidore*, the music of which, often full of inspiration, contains orchestral effects totally unknown at that time, such as that of the four horns employed in their hollowest stopped notes, accompanying, like a sort of instrumental death-rattle, the voice of a dying man; Méhul, in the hope of overwhelming Lesueur, whom he detested, and whose opera *La Caverne* had just scored an immense success — (I had almost forgotten to tell you that Lesueur was a celebrated French composer, born at Drucat-Plessiel, near Abbeville, in the same year as Méhul; he was superintendent of the Emperor Napoleon's chapel, of the chapels of Louis XVIII and Charles X, wrote a number of masses, oratorios, and operas, and left among his papers an *Alexandre à Babylone*, which has never been performed) Méhul, then, irritated at the success of Lesueur's *La Caverne*, set to music an opera on the same subject and bearing the same title. Méhul's *La Caverne* fell flat. I know that the library of the Opéra-Comique possesses this manuscript and I should, I confess, be very curious to judge with my own eyes to what extent this catastrophe was deserved.

Another failure scaled the fame and glory of Méhul, that of *La Chasse du jeune Henri*, an opera the overture of which, being enthusiastically encored, produced so great an impression on the audience that it would not listen to the rest of the score, which, it is said, was rather ordinary.

Among the very fine works of Méhul that enjoyed but little success, *Ariodant* must be given precedence. The subject of this opera is virtually the same as that of the *Montano et Stéphanie* of Berton (a French musician, born in Paris, where he acquired a fine reputation with his theatrical works). Both are borrowed from a tragi-comedy by the English poet, Shakspeare, whom I have mentioned to you awhile ago; its title is *Much Ado about Nothing*. In *Ariodant* there is a jealousy duet almost worthy of being the counterpart of that of *Euphrosyne*, a love duet of crude truth almost verging on indecency, a superb aria: "Oh, of lovers the most faithful!" and the celebrated romance that is surely known to you:

*Femme sensible, entends-tu le ramage
De ces oiseaux qui célèbrent leurs feux?*

Bion, in which is to be found a pretty rondo, *Epicure*, *Le Trésor supposé*, *Hélène*, *Johanna*, *L'Heureux malgré lui*, *Gabrielle d'Estrees*, *Le Prince troubadour*, and *Les Amazones* were not successes, and probably belong to the category of works justly consigned to oblivion. *L'Irato*, *Une Folie*, *Uthal*, *Les Aveugles de Tolède*, *La Journée aux aventures*, *Valentine de Milan*, and *Joseph*, on the other hand, are those to which success has been meted out rather fairly, it seems to me, in proportion to their merit. The least known of these operas, *Les Aveugles de Tolède*, begins with a charming overture in the style of the Spanish bolero. *L'Irato* was written to mystify the First Consul and the people about him, who admitted melody only in the Italians, and especially denied it to Méhul. The work was given as the translation of a Neapolitan opera. Napoleon took good care not to miss the first performance; he applauded with all his might, and said loudly that no French composer could ever write such charming music. Thereupon, the public having called for the name of the author, the stage-manager flung to the astounded house the name of Méhul. An excellent mystification, which will always succeed, at all times and everywhere, and demonstrate the injustice of prejudices, without ever destroying them.

Uthal, with its Ossianic subject, clashed with the *Bardes* of Lesueur, which was pursuing a brilliant career at the Opéra, and which Napoleon had moreover taken under his patronage. Méhul, to give the orchestration of *Uthal* a melancholy colour of the cloudy, Ossianic kind, conceived the idea of employing no strings but the violas and 'cellos, the entire mass of violins being thus suppressed. The result of the continuity of this veiled timbre was a monotony that was more exhausting than poetic; and Grétry, when interrogated on the subject, said frankly: "I would give a louis-d'or to hear an E string."

Joseph is the best known of Méhul's operas in Germany. Its music is almost everywhere simple, touching, rich in modulations that are felicitous without being overbold, broad and vibrating harmonies, and graceful designs of accompaniment, while its expression is always true. The second part of the overture does not seem to me worthy of the expressive introduction that precedes it. The prayer "God of Israel!" in which the voices are supported only by rare chords in the brass, is in its entirety beautiful in

every respect. In the duet between Jacob and Benjamin: "O thou, the worthy support of a father!" are to be found some rather vivid remembrances of *Œdipe à Colonne*, reminiscences that doubtless found their way into Méhul's mind through the similarity between the situation and the sentiments of this duet and several portions of Sacchini's opera.

Méhul has written much more music than that of the operas I have just enumerated. He made, or arranged, three ballet scores: *Le Jugement de Paris*, *La Dansomanie*, and *Persée et Andromède*. He composed choruses and a good overture for Joseph Chénier's tragedy *Timoléon*, several symphonies, a large number of pieces for the solfeggio classes of the Conservatoire, cantatas, operas whose titles I abstain from mentioning, since they were never performed; operas composed for an occasion, such as *Le Pont de Lodi*, and others in which he had collaborators; a piece for two orchestras, the second of which imitates the first in canon, like an echo; it was played on the Champ de Mars at a public festival held in celebration of the victory of Marengo; he wrote the music for a melodrama for the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre, and some patriotic songs, among which is "*Le Chant du départ* (Victory singing)," whose popularity has held its ground beside that of "*La Marseillaise*."

Méhul died on the 18th of October 1817, at the age of fifty-four. It is related that his conversation was engaging, and that he had wit, learning, and a taste for horticulture and flowers. His system in music, if it is possible to call a doctrine of this kind by the name of system, was that of good common sense, which is so disdained in these times. He believed that theatrical music, or any other intended to be joined to words, should present a direct correlation with the sentiments expressed in these words; that sometimes, even, when it can be done without effort and without damage to the melody, it should seek to reproduce the accent of the voice, the declamatory accent, as we may call it, which certain phrases, certain words evoke, and which one feels to be that of nature; he thought that an *interrogation*, for instance, cannot be sung to the same arrangement of notes as an *affirmation*; he believed that for certain impulses of the human heart there are special melodic accents, which alone can truly express them, and which it is necessary to find at whatever cost, under penalty of

being false, inexpressive, and cold, and failing to attain the supreme object of art. Moreover he was fully convinced that in really dramatic music, when the interest of a situation deserves such sacrifices, there should be no hesitation between a pretty musical effect that is foreign to the scenic accent or the dramatic character, and a series of veracious accents that do not give a merely superficial pleasure. He was convinced that musical expression is a gracious flower, delicate and rare, of exquisite fragrance, which does not bloom without culture, and which a breath withers; that it does not dwell in the melody alone, but that everything combines either to bring it into being or to destroy it—melody, harmony, modulations, rhythm, instrumentation, the choice of deep or high registers for voices and instruments, the degree of quickness or slowness of execution, and the various shades of strength in the tone. He knew that one can prove oneself to be a learned or brilliant musician and yet be wholly destitute of the sense of expression; and contrariwise that one can possess this sense in the highest degree and yet be musically mediocre; that the real masters of dramatic art have always been more or less gifted with a combination of highly musical qualities and the sense of expression.

Méhul had none of the preconceived opinions of his contemporaries with regard to certain artistic methods, of which he made clever use when he considered them suitable, and which the professors of routine would proscribe in every case. He was therefore truly and absolutely of Gluck's school; but his style, more correct, more polished, and more academic than that of the German master, was also much less grand, less gripping, less *bitter to the heart*; he has fewer of those immense flashes of lightning that illumine the soul's depths. And then, if I may dare say so, Méhul seems to me somewhat chary of ideas; he made music that was excellent, true, agreeable, beautiful, and touching, but sage to the point of rigorism. His muse possesses intelligence, wit, heart, and beauty; but she preserves the ways of a housewife, her grey gown lacks fullness, and she adores holy economy.

Thus it is that in *Joseph* and in *Valentine de Milan* simplicity is carried to limits which it is dangerous to approach so closely. In *Joseph*, again, as in the majority of his other scores, the orchestra is treated with perfect tact and the extreme of good sense; not a

single instrument is excessive, not one has an unnecessary note; but this same orchestra, in its learned sobriety, lacks colour, even energy, movement, and the indescribable something that gives life. Without the addition of a single instrument to those used by Méhul, it would have been possible, I believe, to give to their ensemble the qualities that it is regrettable not to find in it. I hasten to add that this defect, if it is a real one, seems to me a thousand times preferable to the abominable and repellent oddity that one must give up trying to correct in the majority of modern dramatic composers, thanks to which the art of instrumentation too frequently yields place, in theatrical orchestras, to coarse and ridiculous noises, coarsely and ridiculously introduced, foes of expression and harmony, exterminators of voices and melody, and only proper to give a further accent to deplorably vulgar rhythms, which, in spite of their violence, are actual destroyers of energy; for the energy of sound is only relative, and results only from contrasts cleverly and sparingly used; noises that have nothing musical in them, that are a permanent criticism of the intelligence and taste of the public that is able to endure them, and which have ended by making our theatrical orchestras the emulators of those of mountebanks and quack doctors at village fairs.

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You will admit, notwithstanding the high esteem in which you hold Méhul and his works, that you did not know all this. And it is to *Angélique et Roland* that you are indebted for this unexpected education. Out of evil, good comes occasionally.

I am afraid your second act has not come to an end. Well, then, let us chat awhile. I am once more back from London. This time, barring the exception I must make in favour of a couple of women singers, I heard nothing there in the shape of music but what was somewhat ugly. At the Queen's Theatre I saw a performance of Mozart's *Figaro* that was trombonized, ophicleidized—in a word, *copper-bottomed* like a ship of the line. That is the way they have in England. Neither Mozart, Rossini, Weber, nor Beethoven has been able to escape *reinstrumentation*. Their orchestra is not sufficiently spiced, and it is considered necessary to remedy this defect. Besides, if the theatres have trombone, ophicleide, big drum, triangle, and cymbal players, it is apparently not in order that they

shall fold their arms! This charge is an ancient one, and it seems time to renounce it.

Mademoiselle Cruvelli played the page, and for the first time in my life I heard the part sung intelligibly. Yet Mademoiselle Cruvelli puts a somewhat excessively passionate accentuation into it; she makes Cherubino too big a boy; she almost converts him into a young man. Madame Sontag *was* Suzanne. The existence of a talent of this order is hardly credible even to those who experience its charm. Here is a singer who understands the art of shading, possesses a full keyboard, and knows how to choose and apply them!

*Donnez des lis pour elle,
Des lis à pleines mains.*

I attended the Purcell Commemoration at Westminster Abbey. A small choir of mediocre voices sang hymns, anthems, and motets of this old English master to an organ accompaniment. A small and contemplative audience was present at the ceremony. It was cold, stagnant, somnolent, and slow. I tried to feel admiration, but experienced the contrary feeling. Then, the remembrance of the children's choir of St. Paul's assailing me, I mentally instituted an unfortunate comparison, and I left, leaving Purcell to slumber with his faithful.

Sir George Smart was good enough, one Sunday, to do me the honours of St. James's Chapel, of which he is the organist. Alas! music has forsaken this little nook since kings and queens ceased to reside in the Palace. A few choristers without any voice, eight choir-boys with too much, a primitive organ—this is all there is to be heard there. The chapel was built by Henry VIII, and Sir George showed me the little door by which this good King used to enter to give thanks to God and sing the alleluias composed by himself, each time he had invented a new religion or had one of his wives decapitated.

I also heard at a concert the brilliant *Stabat Mater* of Rossini. You do not know, do you, the history of the fugue that terminates the score of this? Here it is.

Rossini, that great musician of so much wit, none the less had the weakness to believe that a respectable *Stabat*, a true *Stabat*,

a *Stabat* worthy to succeed those of Palestrina and Pergolesi, absolutely must end with a fugue on the word *Amen*. This really constitutes, as you well know, the most abominable and indecent of misrepresentations; but Rossini lacked the courage to defy the settled prejudice in this matter. Now, as fugue is not his strong point, he sought out his friend Tadolini, who has the reputation of being a first-rate contrapuntist, and said to him in his most coaxing manner: "*Caro Tadolini, mi manca la forza; fammi questa fuga!*" Poor Tadolini sacrificed himself and composed the fugue. Then when the *Stabat* appeared, the professors of counterpoint found it detestable, these gentlemen having always had the habit of giving credit for the science of fugue to themselves and their pupils alone; so that after all Rossini, if they are to be believed, might just as well have written his fugue himself.

Such is the anecdote going the rounds; but the real truth, between ourselves, is that the fugue is Rossini's own.

A serious misfortune has just smitten us in Paris, and you will be very lucky not to feel its after effects. Z., the great insulter of art and artists, in despair at having, through a speculation on Change, lost three-fourths of the enormous fortune he had amassed—you know by what means—was unable to resist the temptation to commit suicide. He made his will, bequeathing, it is said, what remained to him to the headmistress of a young girls' school, and, this pious duty fulfilled, wended his way to the Place Vendôme, where he caused the door of the column to be opened to him. On reaching the gallery crowning the top of the monument he took off his hat, cravat, and gloves—I am indebted for these particulars to the custodian of the column—gazed calmly at the abyss opening round him, then, retreating a few steps from the balustrade, as if better to take his spring, he abruptly gave up his idea.

Henri Heine, whom I have just seen, recited to me in French prose a little German elegiac poem he has composed on this catastrophe. It would make you die of laughter.

Poor Heine! Tied to his bed for the last six years by an incurable paralysis, and almost blind, he nevertheless retains his terrible gaiety. He does not consent to die as yet, he says; God must wait. He first wants to see *what the end of it all will be*. He makes *mots* on his enemies, his friends, and himself. The day before yesterday, on hearing me announced, he called out from his bed, with that

feeble voice of his, which seems to issue from a grave: "Eh, my dear fellow, what, it's you? Come in. You have not forsaken me then? . . . Always original!"

If your second act has not come to an end, I am sorry, Corsino, but I have nothing more to tell you for the present. So resign yourself to fate, take up your violin, and play the finale as if it were good. You won't die of it. Moreover I want to read your letter over again; I wish to answer it in such a way as not to be compelled to part company with you until the end of the third act, which you denounce to me as the most dangerous.

.

FOR THE LAST ACT

It was not my intention, when beginning my letter, to make the slightest remark about certain passages in yours. I now come to these. Ah! My four or five readers think I did wrong to refer to the recreations they indulge in, they and their colleagues, when they have to play music they do not like—recreations in which, I confess, I have participated myself.

That is just like artists! If they do something reasonably well, the five hundred and thirty thousand voices of fame, without reckoning her trumpet, must announce it to the five parts of the world; and in what terms, with what flourishes of trumpets! I know it but too well. But if it so happens that they are dragged into some action or production that gives the slightest handle to criticism, then, in spite of all the leniency and the smiles of poor criticism, in spite of the amiable forms it assumes for the sake of benignity, gentleness, and kindness, merely to speak of it is an abominable crime; if they are to be believed, it is an infamy, nay, a mean act, a breach of trust; and each one of these indignant men exclaims with Othello:

"Are there no stones in heaven
But what serve for the thunder?"

Upon my word, my very dear friends, you inspire me with pity. I thought you less behind the times, and I thought I had more of your friendship.

Come, I am going to put on kid gloves to write to you; in future I shall not show myself in your orchestra except with a white cravat, *with all my decorations*, and only speak to you, my lords, with my hat in my hand. . . .

All joking aside, such susceptibility is childish (be grateful that I do not use the word *puerile*) ; but as I consider you incapable of not laughing at it at present, let us change the subject, and never recur to it again.

As for you, Corsino, who think you will appear *ridiculous in the eyes of the literary men and musicians of Paris who will read me*, let me tell you that your fear is absolutely chimerical, for the reason that the literary men of Paris read only their own books, while the musicians never read anything.

I thank you sincerely for having shielded me from the *transversal vendetta* of the outraged tenor, and for *opposing my being played*. I am doubly obliged to you, since the danger would be a double one for me were the opera in question performed at X. I think your colleagues fully capable of transforming it into *an opera in which one speaks*, and beginning the reading of *Clarissa Harlowe* at the first performance.

I confess to the pettiness of my pun on Moran, but your play upon words in the matter of *bavaroises* is just as bad.

It is impossible for me to believe in the corset of your conductor. It is more likely the rehearsals of *Angélique et Roland* that have made him grow thin. Is it then so very bad?

If I have twice said that the *bon Bacon* (just admire the euphony!) is not descended from the celebrated man whose name he bears, it is because his rare intelligence and the depth of his wit would lead one to think the contrary, and that the supposition of such a descent would be calumnious to the scientific Roger Bacon, the inventor of gunpowder, since he was a monk, and monks do not marry. This explanation will, I hope, completely satisfy our friend.

Dimsky, Dervinck, Turuth, Siedler, and you, Corsino, you do not know who Falstaff is! You have the nerve to admit it! If so, you are all of you more B. B. B. Bacon than Bacon himself. Falstaff a poet! a warrior! and you pretend to know your Shakspeare! Know then, messieurs my musician friends, that Sir John Falstaff is an important character in three plays of the English poet, the

two tragedies of *Henry IV*, and the comedy entitled *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; that he also claims the public's attention in a fourth drama of the same author, in which he does not appear, though his last moments are recorded. Know that he was Queen Elizabeth's favourite, that he is the ideal of the English buffoon, the English Gascon, the English hector; that we see in him the true English Punchinello, the representative of five or six capital sins; that gormandizing, lasciviousness, and cowardice are his dominant qualities; that in spite of his obesity, his rotundity, his stinginess, and his poltroonery he bewitches women, making them pawn their silver to satisfy his gluttonous appetites; that Shakspeare has given him as companion to Prince Henry in his orgies and nocturnal escapades in London; that the Prince allows Falstaff to treat him with the most incredible familiarity, until the time when, having become king under the name of Henry V, the *Royal Hal*, as Falstaff has the insolence to call him for short, desirous of having the follies of his youth forgotten, banishes from the Court the fat companion of his carouses, and sends him into exile. Know also that this incomparable cynic, in whom one is interested in spite of oneself, and whose sad end almost brings tears to your eyes, when he is compelled to take part in a great battle at the head of a rabble of vagabonds in rags and tatters of whom he is the captain, runs away at the commencement of the action, and, in the nook where he has gone to hide, delivers himself of the following monologue:

"Honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour pricks me off, when I come on? How then? Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word *honour*? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! —Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. Is it insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it.—Therefore I'll none of it: Honour is a mere scutcheon, and so ends my catechism."

You now see, do you not, how, apropos the work of Camoens and his belated glory, I was justified in exclaiming: "O Falstaff," and thinking of his philosophy. You have a rare insight.

To come, my dear Corsino, to your final question.

The author of that *Life of Paganini* of whom you speak to me recently wrote to one of my friends begging him to obtain from me an analysis of his work in the *Journal des Débats*, hoping, he said, that I would not allow myself to be influenced in my appreciation by my hatred of Italian music and Italians. I therefore read his booklet. It was an easy matter for me to reply to the virulent reproaches addressed to me. But after having concocted my reply I was dissuaded from publishing it in a newspaper, so as not to start a polemic which, being of interest to me alone, would necessarily be out of place in its columns. Here the case is different, and I am glad, since you have read the accusation, to place my defence before you.

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A REPLY TO M. CARLO CONESTABILE,

author of the book entitled

VITA DI NICCOLO PAGANINI DA GENOVA

M. Conestabile of Perugia makes an appeal to my impartiality when he asks me to make an analysis of this booklet, in which he treats me most shamefully. I have to thank him for having nevertheless thought me capable of doing full justice to his work. I shall do so most willingly, accustomed as I am to find myself in this piquant situation. Unfortunately the work is of such a nature that it is impossible for me to express any opinion of value with regard to it. I can judge of neither the historical merit of the book, not being in a position to know the truth of the facts stated in it; nor of the style of the author, since the niceties of the Italian language must necessarily escape me; nor of the exactness with which he appreciates the talent of the great virtuoso, *for I never heard Paganini*. I was in Italy at the time this extraordinary artist was turning everyone's head in France. When I knew him, later on, he had already given up playing in public, the state of his health no longer permitting it; and it may readily be understood that I dared not ask him to play once more for me alone. If I have formed so high an opinion of him, it is, in the first place, from his con-

versation; in the second place from that irradiation that seems to emanate from certain distinguished men, which surrounded Paganini with an aureole of poetry; and in the third place from the ardent and reasoned admiration with which he inspired certain artists in whose judgment I place absolute trust.

I like to think that M. Conestabile has drawn on the purest sources for the purpose of writing the life of the illustrious virtuoso whose appearance in Europe produced such extraordinary excitement. I even acknowledge that, on the topic of my own intercourse with Paganini, he has gathered a few particulars that are correct, and that he has committed only a few mistakes, of but slight importance. I ought perhaps to confine my appreciation to that, but the book contains a passage well calculated to make me violently indignant were the calumny it embodies not tempered by so much absurdity; and the reader will forgive me if I cannot refrain from replying to it briefly.

After having related an anecdote about me that is public property, one in which Paganini played towards me a part so cordially magnificent, after having kindly accorded a too great value to my works, M. Conestabile exclaims: "Now, who would believe it? The very same man who owes to an Italian the triumph of his own genius, the *acquisition* (*conseguimento*) of a considerable sum,⁴ this Berlioz, who belongs to a nation so greatly indebted to the much beloved country of Palestrina, Lulli, Viotti, Spontini, *no longer remembers*, Paganini being dead, the favours he has received; and, after having sucked the venom of ingratitude, delights in vomiting harsh words against *our* music, against *us*, who, with our old-time goodness, are accustomed to endure the insults and outrages of foreign nations [I am translating literally], meeting their coarse sarcasms with disdainful silence. But no, the name of Hector Berlioz will not perish [you are too kind!], nor that of Paganini [a fortiori, this is a pleonasm]; and if contemporaries are silent [all of them are not silent], at least our successors, on learning of the adventure I have just related, will reward Italian

⁴ M. Conestabile alludes here to an enthusiastic gesture by Paganini, who, after having heard (in 1838) at the Conservatoire the first two symphonies of M. Berlioz, sent him, *as a mark of homage* (such was the expression he used) a sum of twenty thousand francs. The present was accompanied by a letter from the illustrious virtuoso, a letter which appeared at the time in all the newspapers of Europe, and everywhere called forth the liveliest admiration. (Publisher's note, M. Lévy.)

philanthropy with their plaudits, and devote a page to French ingratitude"!!!

Really, sir, I would say to him, were you to know how ridiculous this tirade is, you would be very sorry to have allowed it to escape you. You live, I see, in an exclusive circle, which wishes to remain outside the musical movement of Europe. You are passionately fond of *your* music, as you say, without being able to establish useful comparisons between its character and that of the music of other nations. Hence your religious faith in Italian art, and your irritation when anyone ventures to discuss its dogmas. You forget that the majority of artists and critics of any standing are on the contrary acquainted more or less with the masterpieces of all countries; that these same critics and artists attach real value only to genuine, great, original, beautiful music; that they love it for its qualities or detest it because of its vices, without worrying themselves about its land of birth. You were perhaps never aware of this. Well, then, in that case I will teach it you. Whether the author of a musical work is Italian, French, English, or Russian, is a matter of small concern to them. The question of nationality is, in their eyes, altogether puerile.

The proof of this is to be found in your very own book, when, in connexion with Spontini's death, you say that I *could not refrain* (for twenty-five years now I have been unable to refrain!) *from paying his works a liberal tribute of admiration.*

Now let me show you the injustice of the offensive accusation you bring against me, the consequences to be drawn from it were it deserved, and the material error you have committed as regards the foundation of the question.

I see, in the first place, in this very accusation a proof that you, at least, will not meet sarcasms with a disdainful silence and that you are almost exempt from the *old-time goodness* of your compatriots.

You believe that, a great Italian artist having done what Paganini did for me, I am therefore bound, for that sole reason, to find excellent, perfect, irreproachable, everything that is done in Italy, to praise the theatrical customs of that beautiful country, the musical predilections of its inhabitants, the results of these predilections and customs on the exercise of the freest of arts, and the compression they fatally exercise on it.

Although French, sir, I owe a great deal to France; according to you, I should therefore regard all the music she produces as good. This would be a very serious matter, since almost as much bad music is made in France as in your own country. I am also greatly indebted, to Prussia, Austria, Bohemia, Russia, and England; I am loaded with debts of this sort, incurred almost everywhere. I should therefore declare that all is for the best in the best of worlds, and exclaim: "All of you are sublime, let us embrace!" without adding: "And there's an end to it!"

You claim finally that with regard to each nation a solitary individual in which may have been good enough to discern some merit in me, I must ignore my conscience as an artist and, regardless of the truth, play a silly comedy of admiration.

Paganini, sir, who did not share your opinion, would have despised me had I been capable of such conduct. Moreover, I know full well what he thought of the musical habits of his country, although he never had occasion, most happily for him and perhaps for you, to express his opinion on the subject in writing. I tremble at the thought of letting you even suspect what Cherubini and Spontini also thought of it, these two whose fame and works you lay claim to as being yours, although Italy has cared little for either. Paganini, Spontini, and Cherubini were therefore greater monsters of ingratitude than I, since if the rest of Europe, by affording them a career greater than that imposed on its musicians by Italy, has forced their genius to take a higher and prouder flight and has showered on them gold, honours, and glory, Italy gave them—birth; and this one not very costly present is truly worth something. Pray notice, besides, that Paganini is not Italy, any more than I am France. These two countries, of which you justly glorify one while flagellating the other beyond measure, can in no sense be answerable *en masse* for the private sentiments of a couple of artists. Even if we are to admit, as you have so naïvely expressed it, that all Italians are *philanthropists*, it is impossible for me to grant to you that all Frenchmen are *ingrates*.

I wish, moreover, to make an important confession to you; however passionately fond you may be of *your music*, I am almost certain of being still more so of *music itself*, to the point that I feel myself quite capable of a feeling of affectionate sympathy for

a brigand of genius, even if he had attempted to murder me, and hardly any for an honest man to whom nature has denied intelligence and a feeling for art.

No doubt your convictions are sincere and you are a thoroughly honest man. But, pray believe me, the ideas of Paganini on that point hardly differed from my own monstrous manner of thinking. Finally, to complete my confession of faith, let me say that I am deeply grateful to the men whose works kindle admiration in me, but I shall never admire mediocrities, even if their treatment of me may have inspired me with the keenest gratitude. You may judge from this the value of the right I arrogate to myself not to praise the mediocre or even worse than mediocre works and talents of people to whom I do not owe anything.

Now to take up a mistake in a date, which also has its importance. The criticism of mine that you quote, altering the meaning of it by substituting *melodic sense* for *sense of expression*—a very different thing, I assure you—this study of the musical trend of Italy, which has been made the basis of the charge in connexion with which I now have the pleasure of conversing with you, was written in 1830, in Rome. It was printed for the first time in Paris, during the course of the same year, by the *Revue européenne*, and afterwards reproduced in various publications (among them *L'Italie pittoresque*) and in the *Revue musicale* of M. Fétis, who at first taxed my opinion with exaggeration, but later on admitted its accuracy and justice. You can satisfy yourself of this by reading the account M. Fétis published of his journey to Italy, in the *Gazette musicale*. Now, I saw Paganini for the first time in 1833. You will therefore see that there can absolutely be no ingratitude in my article, since it was written, printed, and reproduced long before I had even met the immortal virtuoso of whom you are the biographer, and before he had honoured me with his friendship. This, I presume, will be sufficient to detract somewhat from the value of your accusation, but it does not prevent my having at the present moment the same ideas about what Italy may have retained of its musical manners of 1830, or my still claiming the right to express them, without the least in the world deserving the reproach of ingratitude that you have had the patriotism to address to me.

This, sir, is all I can say regarding your book, which, after all,

seems to be written with an honourable object, and with the best of intentions.

I shall now answer, *caro* Corsino, the other *important* question contained in your letter.

Yes, I do know Wallace, and it is a pleasure to me to learn that you like his opera *Maritana*. This work, which has been so well received in Vienna and London, is, however, as yet unknown to me. As to the author, here are a few improbable details concerning him, which may interest you. Take them for granted, for I have them from Wallace himself, and he is too indolent, in spite of his vagabond humour, to take the trouble of lying.

VINCENT WALLACE

English Composer.

HIS ADVENTURES IN NEW ZEALAND

Vincent Wallace was born in Ireland. He began as a distinguished violinist, who won great success in India and Australia. Afterwards he gave up the violin to devote himself to teaching the piano, an instrument of which he is master, and to composition. He is a first-class *eccentric*, as phlegmatic in appearance as certain Englishmen, but in reality as rash and violent as an American. We have spent together, in London, many half-nights over a bowl of punch, he narrating his strange adventures, I listening eagerly to them. He has carried off women, he has fought several duels that turned out badly for his adversaries, and he was a savage—yes, a savage, or pretty nearly one, for six months. This is how I have heard him narrate, with his customary phlegm, this strange episode of his life:

“I was in Sydney [Wallace says: ‘I was in Sydney,’ or ‘I am going to Calcutta,’ just as we say in Paris: ‘I am off to Versailles,’ or ‘I am back from Rouen’] when the commander of an English frigate of my acquaintance, having met me in the port, proposed

to me, between two cigars, to accompany him to New Zealand.—‘What are you going there for?’ I asked him.—‘To chastise the inhabitants of Tewaewa-Punamu Bay, the most ferocious of New Zealanders, who took into their heads, last year, to loot one of our whaling-ships and eat its crew. Come along with me, the crossing is not a long one, and the expedition will be amusing.’—‘I will come with pleasure. When do we start?’—‘Tomorrow.’—‘All right, I shall be one of you.’—So the next day we set sail, and the voyage was soon over. On sighting New Zealand our commander, who had made straight for the bay, gave orders to put the ship in disorder, tear a few sails, break two or three yards, close the ports, carefully screen our guns, conceal our soldiers and three-fourths of the crew ’tween-decks—in a word, give our frigate the appearance of a poor devil of a ship half disabled by a gale and no longer answering its helm.

“As soon as the New Zealanders caught sight of us, their customary caution made them remain quiet. But after counting only ten men on the frigate, and believing from our wretched appearance and the uncertainty of our movements that we were shipwrecked mariners asking for help rather than an attacking party, they laid hold of their weapons and made their way towards us from every corner of the shore. Never in my life have I seen so many canoes. They came from land, sea, bushes, rocks, everywhere. And remember that several of these boats contained as many as fifty warriors. It was like a school of huge fish swimming alongside of us and closing their ranks. We suffered ourselves to be surrounded like men incapable of offering any resistance. But when the canoes, divided into two masses, were within half a pistol’s range, and so closely packed as to be unable to tack, a slight stroke of the helm caused our frigate to present its flanks to the two flotillas, whereupon our commander shouted: ‘In battle formation on deck! Throw open the ports! Broadides for the vermin!’ Port and starboard guns, simultaneously poking their muzzles out of the ship’s sides just like inquisitive folk putting their heads out of the windows, began to spit on the tattooed warriors a perfect hail of grape-shot, ball, and bombs. Our four hundred soldiers accompanied the concert with well-directed and heavy fusillade. Everybody was at work; it was superb. From the top of one of the mainmast’s yards, to which I had climbed with my pocket full of

cartridges, my double-barrelled gun, and a dozen grenades handed me by the master-gunner, I, for my part, destroyed the appetite of many New Zealanders, who had perhaps already dug the oven in which they had counted on baking me. I am unable to tell you how many I killed. Of course you know that in that country nothing is thought of killing men. You cannot conceive the effect of my grenades in particular. They burst between their legs and sent them flying sky high, to drop into the sea like giltheads, while the twenty-four- and thirty-six-pounders, with their big cannon-balls, raked with their fire whole batches of canoes, cutting them in two with a cracking noise like lightning striking a tree. The wounded yelled, the runaways drowned, while our commander stamped about, shouting through his speaking-trumpet: 'One more broadside! Give them bar-shot! Shoot that chief with red feathers! Out launch, out cutter, out yawl! Finish the swimmers off with the handspike! Knock them on the head, my lads! God save the Queen!'

"The sea was strewn with corpses, limbs, tomahawks, paddles, and wreckage from the canoes, while here and there the green waters were fleckd with big crimson puddles. We were beginning to tire, when our men in the launch, who were less infuriated than the commander, having contented themselves with sending another dozen swimmers to kingdom come with pistol-shots and blows of their oars, hauled out of the water a couple of magnificent Zealanders, two exhausted chiefs. They were hoisted half dead on to the deck of the frigate. In another hour the two Goliaths were on their feet again, as lively as panthers. The interpreter we had brought from Sydney went up to them to assure them that they had nothing more to fear, white men not being in the habit of killing their prisoners.—'But then,' said one of the two, whose height was immense and whose aspect was terrifying, 'why did the whites fire at us with their big guns and little guns? We were not yet at war.'—'Do you remember,' said the interpreter, 'the whalers whom you killed and ate last year? They belonged to our nation and we came to avenge them.'—'Oh,' exclaimed the big chief, stamping violently on the deck, and gazing at his companion with savage enthusiasm, 'very well, then. The whites are great warriors!' Our procedure evidently filled them with admiration. They judged us from the standpoint of art, like connoisseurs, noble rivals, great artists.

"The Zealander fleet having been destroyed and the butchery finished, our commander informs us, somewhat late in the day, that he must now sail for Tasmania, instead of returning to New South Wales. I was greatly annoyed at being compelled to undertake this new journey, since it would take some time. Luckily the frigate's surgeon expressed a wish to remain at Tewaewa-Punamu for the purpose of studying the New Zealand flora, and enriching his collection of plants, if the commander would pick him up on his return from Sydney; the former readily agreed. Thereupon the idea of seeing these terrible savages at close range took hold of me and I volunteered to accompany the surgeon. The two chiefs were to be set free, on condition that they would vouch for our safety. These men, whom the arrangement suited to perfection, promised to protect us while we were among their people, who, if they were to be believed, would welcome us. '*Tayo, tayo* (Friend)!' they said, rubbing noses with us according to custom. '*Tayo rangatira* (Friends of the chiefs)!' "

"The pact was concluded. We were taken ashore, the surgeon, the two chiefs, and myself.

"I felt, I must admit, some anxiety on setting foot on the now deserted beach, which had been covered a few hours before with armed enemies, and which we trod, we conquerors, with no other protection against the fury of the vanquished than the word and doubtful authority of a couple of cannibal chiefs."

"Upon my honour," I said to Wallace interrupting him, "you both deserved to be roasted over a slow fire and eaten. Such presumptuous folly is inconceivable!"

"Anyhow nothing happened to us. On rejoining their tribe our chiefs explained that a peace had been concluded and that they owed their freedom to us. Thereupon they made us kneel at their feet and lightly tapped both of us on the nape of the neck with a tomahawk, making certain signs and uttering words that made us *sacred*.

"Men, women, and children shouting '*Tayo*!' in their turn approached us with curiosity, but without the slightest appearance of hostility. They seemed to be flattered by our confidence, and all responded to it. Besides, the surgeon won them over to us by dressing the wounds of the few who had survived the grape-shot, and of whom several had severe injuries and fractures. At the end of a few

days he left me to explore a forest in the interior under the guidance of Koro, the big chief.

"I had already, a year previously, learnt, in the Hawaiian Islands, a few words of the kanaka language, which, in spite of the enormous distances that separate these various archipelagos, is in use in the Hawaiian Islands, Tahiti, and New Zealand. At the outset I used them to captivate two charming little native girls, as lively and coquettish as Parisian work-girls, with large, sparkling black eyes, and eyelashes the length of my finger. Their shyness once conquered, they followed me like a couple of llamas, Méré carrying my gunpowder and bag of bullets, Moïanga the game I brought down during our excursions; at night each of them in turn served me as a pillow, when we slept in the open. Such nights, such stars, such a sky! That country is paradise on earth.

"Would you believe that I was nevertheless smitten by the most unexpected and infernal of sorrows? Emaï, my protecting chief, had a daughter of sixteen, who had not shown herself at first, and whose piquant beauty, when I set eyes on her, implanted in my heart a fearful love, with all the tremors, choking, and abominable nervous sensations consequent upon it.

"Pray dispense me from drawing her portrait. I believed it would be sufficient for me to introduce myself to her to be welcomed with open arms; Méré and Moïanga had spoiled me. I therefore tried, after a few honeyed words, to take her into a field of phormium (the flax of the country) there to spin golden and silken hours. But no; she resisted, and her resistance was obstinate. Then I resigned myself to courting her in due form, and assiduously. The father of Tatéa (that was her name) warmly espoused my cause; often, in my presence, he severely scolded the pretty little rebel. I offered Tatéa one after the other, and finally altogether, the gilt brass buttons of my waistcoat, then my knife, my pipe, my sole blanket, and over a hundred blue and pink glass beads; I killed a dozen albatrosses with which to make her a cloak of white down; I proposed that she should herself cut off my little finger. This seemed to shake her resolution for a moment, but still she refused. Her indignant father was on the point of breaking her arm, and it was with great trouble that I dissuaded him. My two other women then took a hand in the matter and tried to overcome her obstinacy.

"Jealousy is ridiculous in New Zealand, and my women were not ridiculous.

"Nothing came of it.

"And then I succumbed to lowness of spirits. I ceased eating, smoking, sleeping. I hunted no more, and spoke not a word either to Moïanga or to Mére; the poor creatures wept; I took no notice of them, and was about to blow out my brains, when the idea came to me of offering Tatéa a keg of tobacco that was always strapped to my back.

"That was what she had desired! ! ! And I had never thought of it! ! !

"The most soothing smile greeted my offering; she put out her hand to me, and as I touched it, I felt my heart melt, just like a lump of lead in the fire of a smithy. The wedding gift was accepted. Mére and Moïanga hastened to carry the good news to Emaï, while Tatéa, delighted at possessing the precious keg, which she had persisted in not asking for from pure coquettishness, loosened her hair at last and dragged me palpitating towards the field of phormium. . . .

"Oh, my dear friend, do not speak to me about our European women!

"At sunset my first two little women and my queen Tatéa and I all sat down together in a corner of the wood to a most delirious family supper composed of fern roots, *kopanas* (potatoes), a magnificent fish, an iguana (a large arboreal lizard), and three wild ducks, all baked in an oven between red-hot stones, according to native custom, and washed down with a few glasses of the brandy remaining to me.

"Had it been proposed to me, on that evening, to transport me to China into the Emperor's porcelain palace and to give me the celestial princess, his daughter, as wife, with a hundred mandarins decorated with the crystal button to wait upon me, I should have refused.

"On the day following the private nuptials, the surgeon returned from his botanical expedition. He was loaded with more or less dry plants and looked like a walking hayrick. His chief and mine, Koro and Emaï, our two mahouts, resolved to celebrate the reunion and our marriage with a splendid official feast. They had just caught a young female slave in the very act of stealing in their pah (vil-

lage), and determined to punish her with death for the solemnity. This was done, though I protested that we had already a very fine dinner and that I would not eat a bit of her.

"As a matter of fact, you may believe me, at the risk of disobliging our chiefs, who had gone out of their way to entertain us, at the risk even of irritating Tatéa, who thought my repugnance most absurd, it was in vain that I was offered the best cut from the shoulder of the slave, served on a green fern-leaf and surrounded by succulent *koranas*; I simply could not touch it. Our European education is really singular! I am ashamed of it. But this sentiment of horror of human flesh, inculcated from childhood, becomes a second nature, and it is in vain that one would attempt to thwart it.

"Out of bravado, the surgeon attempted to taste the shoulder I had declined; almost immediately he was punished for his experiment by violent spasms of nausea, to the great anger of Kaé, Koro's cook, whose self-esteem was hurt. But my first two little women, my darling Tatéa, Koro, and my father-in-law soon mollified him by paying signal homage to his culinary skill.

"After dinner the surgeon, who had a rather respectable bottle of brandy, handed it first to Emaï, who, after having taken a drink of it, said to him in a grave voice: '*Ko tinga na, hia ou owe (May you enjoy good health and be happy)!*'"

"So natural is the custom of toasting, for which England is sometimes censured! Koro imitated him, and, addressing me, repeated Emaï's kind wish. Méré and Moïanga gazed at me tenderly. And then, while the chiefs were smoking a few pinches of tobacco from the small keg, generously given them by the new bride, Tatéa snuggled close to me, nonchalantly rested her head against mine, and sang into my ear, as if telling me a secret, three couplets, of which this is the refrain, which I shall never forget:

*E takowe e o mo toku mei rangui
Ka tai Ki reira, aku rangui auraki*

(When you have reached the haven whither you wish to go, my love will follow you).

"Shame to our cold music, our impudent melody, our dull harmony, our Cyclopean song! Where is to be found in Europe this mysterious voice of a bird in love, the secret murmur of which made

my whole being quiver with a new and fearful voluptuousness! What warblings of the harp can imitate it? Where is the delicate web of *harmonic sounds* that can give an idea of it? And the sad refrain in which Tatéa, associating, by a strange caprice, the expression of her love with the thought of our separation, spoke to me of the *far-off haven . . . whither her feelings of affection would follow me. . . .*

"Beloved Tatéa! Sweet bird! While singing, just as an Indian finch sings under the foliage at noon, with her left hand she was entwining my neck with a long tress of her beautiful black hair, and with her right toying with the knuckle-bones of the slave's foot that she had just eaten. An enchanting blend of love, childishness, and reverie! Did the old world ever suspect such poetry? Shakspeare, Beethoven, Byron, Weber, Moore, Shelley, Tennyson, you are merely rough men of prose!

"During this scene, Kaé had almost ceaselessly indulged in a whispered chat with the bottle, which told him so many things that Koro and the surgeon had to help him along to his cabin, where he dropped down dead drunk.

"More drunk than the cook, but drunk with love, I carried rather than led Tatéa away; and my two other little women once more slept peacefully through the night.

"Tatéa had noticed that often in my moments of reverie, when we sat together on the shore, I traced in the sand, with my ramrod, the letter T.

"She ended by asking me why I persisted in tracing this sign, and I succeeded, not without some difficulty, in making her understand that it recalled her name to me. I astonished her greatly. She probably had a doubt that such a thing was possible, but having herself, on a day when I was absent, scratched a rough T on a rock, she showed it to me and clapped her hands when she heard me at once exclaim: 'Tatéa!'

"You may perhaps imagine that in these details I am laughing at myself, and you well may say that I was drifting towards the pastoral, to Daphneism. Not at all; I was simply happy, and I am not a Frenchman.

"Many similar days and nights passed in succession. Though I did not realize it, they amounted to weeks and months; I had forgotten the world and England when the frigate showed up again in

the bay and recalled to me *that there was a port to which I must go*. It is astonishing, but after the first chill that its appearance spread through my veins, I felt almost courageous. The English flag flying at the mainmast produced on me the effect of the diamond shield on Rinaldo, and it now seemed possible, not to say easy, to tear myself from the arms of my Armida.⁵ And yet, when I announced my departure to her, what tears, what despair, what convulsions of the heart! At first Tatéa showed herself the more resigned of the two. But when the cutter of the frigate had come to shore, when she saw the surgeon get into it and wait for me, when I had made my last presents to Emaï and Koro, she threw herself distractedly at my feet and entreated me to give her one more proof of my love, the last—a strange proof, which would never have come into my mind. ‘Yes, yes, anything you ask,’ I said to her, raising her from the ground, and hugging her frantically, ‘what is it you wish for, my gun, my gunpowder, my shot? Take them, take them, for is not all that belongs to me yours?’ She shook her head. Then, grasping the knife of her father, who had been an impassible witness of our farewells, she brought its point close to my bare chest and gave me to understand, for she could no longer speak, that she wished to make a mark there. I consented. Tatéa thereupon slashed me twice, making a cross-shaped incision, whence the blood spurted forth in jets. Immediately the poor child flung herself on my chest, which was streaming with blood, laid against it her lips, cheeks, neck, bosom, and hair, and drank my blood, which mingled with her tears; she screamed, she sobbed. Oh, old England, I proved to you that day that I loved you!

“Méré and Moïanga had sprung into the water before the cutter’s departure; I found them at the frigate’s companion.

“There was another scene, amid heart-rending shrieks. In vain did I keep my eyes fixed on the Britannic flag; my strength failed me for a moment. I had left Tatéa fainting on the beach; at my feet the two other dear creatures, swimming with one hand and waving farewell signs to me with the other, repeated in their wailing voices: ‘O Walla, Walla!’ (their way of pronouncing my name). What efforts it cost me to climb the ship’s ladder! As I mounted each step, it seemed to me that I was fracturing a limb.

⁵ This is a reference to the story of Rinaldo and Armida in Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*. (Translator’s note.)

On reaching the deck I could endure it no longer; I turned round and was on the point of springing into the water, swimming ashore, embracing all three of them, fleeing with them into the forest, and letting the frigate sail away loaded with my curses, when the commander, divining this rash impulse, made a sign to the regimental musicians on board; 'Rule Britannia' was played, a supreme and heart-rending reaction took place in me, and, three-fourths insane, I rushed into the saloon, where I remained till evening, stretched out on the floor like a living corpse.

"On recovering consciousness my first impulse was to run up on deck, as if I would find there. . . . We were already far away—no land in sight—nothing but heaven and water. . . . Then only did I give a long scream of maddened suffering; it relieved me.

"My chest was still bleeding. Wishing to make the scar ineffaceable, I procured some gunpowder and coral, which I pounded together and put in the wound. I had learnt this process of tattooing from I'mai. It succeeded perfectly. Just look" (said the narrator, opening his waistcoat and shirt, and showing me a large bluish cross), "it means for me Tatéa in the language of New Zealand. Should you ever come across a European woman capable of having as naïve an idea, I will allow you to believe in her affection and remain faithful to her."

It would have been difficult for Wallace to continue any further with his secrets that evening. He was not crying, but red streaks ploughed the whites of his eyes, his lips foamed, he went and stood before a mirror and remained there a long time, gazing sombrely at Tatéa's signature. It was now three o'clock in the morning and I left, a prey to a heavy feeling of oppression. On reaching my home, I did not go to sleep without making long reflections on the hospitality of the New Zealand warriors, the prejudices of Europeans against slaves, the influence of small kegs of tobacco, polygamy, savage love, and the frenzied patriotism of the English.

Two years later Wallace called on me in Paris. Frederick Beale, that king of English publishers, that intelligent and generous friend of artists, had commissioned him to write a two-act opera for a London theatre. Wallace reckoned on making use of his Paris leisure to write this short work; but an acute inflammation of the eye, which supervened almost immediately on his arrival, and which nearly deprived him of his eyesight, prevented his doing so and

compelled him to go through a period of long and sad inactivity.

Having recovered at last, owing to the care of the learned Dr. Sichel, the eminent oculist whom I had brought to see him, he returned to London with the intention, after having finished his opera, of making another trip round the world to divert himself—also, I like to believe, of revisiting New Zealand. He did indeed undertake the journey; but reasons of which I am ignorant made him tarry in New York, where, under the pretext that he is making thousands of dollars out of his drawing-room compositions, of which the Americans are passionately fond, he forgets his friends, male and female, and is satisfied to lead a commonplace life among highly civilized people.

I would give a good deal to know whether the tattooing on his chest is still visible.

Poor Tatéa, I fear your knife did not cut deeply enough!

This does not prevent my saying to him across the Atlantic: "Good morning, my dear Wallace; do you think I have committed *a breach of trust* in publishing your *Odyssey*? I warrant you do not."

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I flatter myself, gentlemen, that your opera is now nearing its end. At all events, should my letter not last two and a half hours, I am very much grieved, but I am unable to extend it; to me it seems to last ten mortal hours.

So farewell, Corsino; farewell, Dervinck; farewell, Dimsky; farewell to all of you. We may meet again. . . . Heavens, how sad I am!

Enough of epilogue.

*This
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who, it is generally con-
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